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# Chaim's Journal:

## The Story of a Survivor

**Narrated by,  
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&  
Written by,  
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This book chronologically describes the life of a young Jewish boy who grew up in Poland during the Holocaust. Chaim was not enslaved in a "labor" death camp, if that were possible anywhere in Europe during these horrible times, hidden in an attic, basement or closet. Chaim however was one of the few people whose stories have never been expressed, told, or explained in anyway what so ever until now. Chaim survived the duration of the war in the wild woods, utilizing intelligence, raw courage, cunning, and most of all, "something greater than any power of nature on this Earth." This is his story...

## CHAPTER I

### LIFE BEFORE THE INVASION

Hello, my name is Chaim Melcer, I was born in 1930 to David and Fayga Melcer. I am the oldest and only survivor of four children. My two brothers, Eile and Yakov were born in 1931 and 1933. My sister Ennie was born in 1939. My mother's father who was around sixty-five years old also lived with us. My story begins in 1939 when I was nine years old.

My family and I lived in Eastern Poland. This region survived essentially on what it produced. We lived right on the river bed of the Bug, a river partly dividing Poland from Russia. This made our land very fertile and well-suited towards agriculture. The countryside was beautiful. Farms were checkered with acres of brightly covered fields growing everything from rye to potatoes and vast pastures were polka dotted with hundreds of cattle grazing among the rich grass. There were also sprawling expanses of thick wild woods that could have disoriented the greatest navigator.

A mile away from our village there was a small train station named after our village. Trains came in every day delivering and taking away goods and supplies.

The name of our village was Sobibor. It encompassed two-hundred forty homes and over 1,100 people. This was a relatively small village. (Describe village in greater detail.) Nine homes and seventy-two people was the whole of the Jewish community. We were always the minority but that never seemed to be too much of a problem. We

were all equally poor. We only had time to worry about ourselves, our families and our business, the crops and cattle, in order to survive.

Life was hard work but through family and religion I found it to be quite lovely. Most of our time was spent working in the fields or helping around the house. We lived on a little four acre plot of land in a modest house consisting of three rooms; a kitchen, a small library and one bedroom.

The house was my mother's responsibility. She worked hard all day long taking care of her home. Mother prepared all of the meals, from breakfast first thing in the morning to mid-day lunch to dinner and desert at night. Mom also cooked extravagant meals for the Shabbat dinner and Holy Days. She enjoyed cooking for her family. Love was the force that transformed the "raw materials" which came from the fields to the "final product" which left for the table to be consumed by seven hungry people. Most importantly though, Mother was the moral support of our family's livelihood.

In our library we owned forest of religious books. I say forest because that is probably what was necessary to create all of these doctrines. The most esteemed and respected part of our house were the shelves of Hebrew prayer books. My father was a very religious man. He taught our family a lot about our religion. He really loved and respected our Torah and the laws of Judaism. My family's as well as every other Jewish family's moral fiber came and existed from these books of G-D. We found direction and hope in these scriptures which have been read and sacrificed for, for thousands of years from generation to generation. As life turned out, I would soon realize that the price I would have to pay for my beliefs were as costly as ever.

We all slept in the same room at night. Seven people all in a room no bigger than a stall was the nightly ritual we all attended. This was very difficult at times but we knew no other life. We had no privacy but our decency and self respect was never compromised. Working with what one had was the village creed. Nobody had much. We all stuck together and made do with what we could. That was the only way to survive. During the winters our tight quarters served a good purpose. Sleeping together made for the most effective and comfortable human insulation. Staying together during the bone chilling nights truly bonded the family with the fight for survival in a result that kept us all lovingly warm.

Much of our survival was based on our agriculture and cattle. We worked enough earth to harvest a sufficient amount of vegetables and cattle for a comfortable living. On our land we grew corn, potatoes and beans. We sold any surplus at the market. We maintained six cows from which we would harvest our milk and beef.

My father was the head of the household. He was a hard working cattle dealer. This was an extremely demanding job. He tended to his cattle all day out in the fields. Every so often he would have to leave us to attend an auction fifty kilometers away in town for three days at a time to buy and sell his cattle.

My brothers mostly helped around the house doing little tasks. They were too young to do much of anything else. Grandpa and my sister kept each other occupied all day. They would play and have fun all day long. I am not sure who took care of who the most.

Sobibor had its own tiny community school. It was about a mile and a half from my house. I would learn the basics: reading, writing and arithmetic. I attended school from seven in the morning until one o'clock in the afternoon. I came home afterwards to eat lunch with my entire family. Dad usually worked through this meal, so I saw him during the night.

I left the house again at two o'clock to go to a Hebrew school. I learned about Judaism; the language, praying and holidays. These lessons usually lasted until five o'clock. After these classes I went home for the night. As soon as I arrived home I would see if my mother needed any help. I then completed any assigned homework. By that time we were all ready to eat dinner. We ate our very important dinner with the entire family seated, eating and conversing together. After dinner I would go right to sleep in preparation for the next day.

The day of rest, Shabbat, was totally different from the rest of the week. We waited all week for this occasion. Friday afternoon we would not go to Hebrew school. We all took baths and put on our nicest clothes in preparation for the night to come. We prayed at our local synagogue and made a minyan. This is a Hebrew prayer session in which there are at least ten men or more present. After the prayers we all came home and celebrated. Friday nights we would eat a large dinner and every Saturday, a big lunch. There was plenty to eat. We ate home made challas, meat and fish. We could not drink milk on Friday nights because we kept Kosher. In part, keeping Kosher means we are not permitted to eat meat and drink milk at the same sitting because we would not want to drown a cow in its own nourishing milk. For that reason we mostly drank water. On the most special occasions and holidays we would drink wine but that was very rare. We finished our meal with a delicious desert which my mother had made that day.

There were also holidays that seemed to be too few and far between. They were a welcome change in the never changing monotonous way of living. They brought a special meaning to life and living with wonderful celebrations, food and fun.



We did not know from electricity or gas because to us it did not exist. To have the luxuries of light or heat, we had to burn something, usually candles for light and wood for heat. As soon as the sun went down we made a fire. Most of the farmers and everybody else were in their house after dark. It was very inconvenient to do anything else. We really lived according to the sun.

We did not have plumbing in the house or any type of running water. Whenever my family needed water for drinking, cooking or bathing I would walk to the well and bring back bucket-fuls of water.

We bathed about once a week. In order to take a bath we would have to go to the well and collect enough water to fill a large wooden barrel. After that exercise one needed a bath! Then we would jump in and wash off. During the winter taking baths was physically shocking. We had to wash off in the near freezing water. But sometimes if we were able, we would get out the largest pot in the house then fill it with as much water from the well as possible and put it on the stove to warm up. We would then fill the tub with the warm water. That was so pleasant, I almost enjoyed those baths. During the summer bathing was much easier, we took our baths in the river. This was fun.

An outhouse was where we went to let nature take its course. This was a little structure set off from the house. Inside was a sort of bench with a hole in it, leading to a deep hole dug in the ground. The worst part about this was that it was a year round business room. By saying visits to that room during the winter were extremely cold is expressing the feeling very lightly.

## CHAPTER 2

### LIFE DURING INITIAL OCCUPATION

*September 1, 1939,*

As I later found out, Germany began its attack on Poland this day. The German soldiers had steadily been invading Poland piece by piece. We had no way of knowing about this due to the lack of effective communication between the villages. I would have imagined that the Fuhrer would have eventually been satisfied with all of the land they had taken over and the lives they had ruined. This was not the case. In fact, it now seems that with every territory gained for the Germans, they became greedier and greedier. This is what lead them to my village one fateful day.

*September 14 of 1939,*

An army of one-hundred German troops on motorcycles and horseback surprisingly invaded our town. We had no idea of what was happening. We were all worried. I was scared right away. If you saw one German you saw one-hundred. I asked my grandpa "What is happening?"

He said "I don't know."

I said "I don't think this looks so good. Maybe we should get away from here."

My Grandpa said "Why run away from the Germans, they are good people." They treated the Jewish people well in World War One. When the Germans came into the village and we saw them beating the Jewish people and ripping our their beards he said "These are not the same Germans!"

The Germans immediately seized the largest property of the village. The property belonged to a wealthy family known as the Gegits. Their estate was transformed into the German's command post of terror and death. We were now under German control. This was the first day of the rest of the lives for the Jewish people in the village.

The Germans then sought out the houses of the Jewish people. They came directly to our houses and forced us outside where all of us were put in a group. They took all of our valuables. We were too afraid to even attempt to hide them. If the Germans found out that there was anything that they might want was being hidden, they killed would you. They took our property and our cows. They gave what they took from us to our neighbors.

All of the nine Jewish families were packed together into three houses, three families to a house. With at least six people in each family, up to eighteen people shared a house no bigger than the one families had originally lived in. My family moved into my father's sister's house which was right across the street. These close quarters made it easier for the Germans to keep us under their ever watchful eye for the slightest infraction. At a moments notice we could all be summoned together and punished for whatever irrational reason they gave, if they gave a reason at all.

The Germans gutted the synagogue in our village. They threw out all of our religious items including prayer books into a big pile and set them on fire, sending them to the heavens. The Rabbi was ordered to take out the Torah and unscroll it on the ground. After much refusal and beatings the demand was granted. The German's were not finished yet. They forced all of the Jewish people to jump up and down on this sacred document, totally destroying it. The only reason that the entire synagogue was not burned to the ground all together was because the Germans decided this building would serve as a convenient barn for all of their animals.

We were not allowed to pray but we did anyway in secrecy. We were not able to organize to have a proper minion of ten Jewish people but we made do with what we had.

The SS prohibited Jewish people from being taught. I was not allowed to go to school anymore. I had only been in the third grade and just started to understand how to read and write Polish.

The Germans enjoyed beating us. We had to salute them and bow to them. If we did not we were beaten. We had no rights. We expected them to be the boss and work for them. We did not expect them to be animals.

There was always plenty of work. Work and beatings were free. We had to go to the Germans for work. During the day every one of us that could work had to and did every day no matter the conditions. Those who did not were killed. We slaved in the

snow, rain and scorching sun. We did everything from cleaning the houses of our captors to cutting wood for their fire places. If you did not come in time, they beat the heck out of you. My whole family worked separately in different areas.

My father worked for the German Border Patrol cleaning their office. He had to mop the floors, wash the windows and anything else the Germans could think for him to do.

My mom was put to work every so often. The Border Patrol made her clean their offices too. But a lot of the time Mother was permitted to stay home and tend to her home and family as Mother had done before the invasion.

At the age of twelve I was now watching cows, a job fulfilled normally by people twice my age. But these were not normal times. These were far from normal times. My nine year old brother watched cows by himself too. My littlest brother who was six years old watched sheep with my dad. My Grandpa and little sister stayed home. They could not do much and were not noticed. I was given about a pound of bread a week as compensation for my work. I managed to save half of my minuscule portions as extra food for my mom. I snuck the half a pound of bread to my mom every week. That does not sound like much but was a lot back then.

The gentiles (non-Jews) of the village were not treated as poorly as we were. They were never beaten or degraded as we were. In fact, they led pretty much unchanged lives. If some extra work was needed, the Germans would use a couple of them. They only had to pay the Germans taxes and give a tiny amount, compared to us, of their harvest to them. A few of the gentiles managed to evade this persecution by running away to Russia.

We were never allowed to leave our town. In order for that to happen we had to have passports but we never were given passports, only papers saying we were Jewish people. We had to have papers that we were working or else we were killed. We occasionally attempted to bribe the Germans with money and gold for possible freedom. This sacrificial offering to our captors worked sometimes but often they took what we gave them and killed us anyway.

Some of the villagers were hiding some escapees. The Germans soldiers knew about this. The soldiers did not admit to there being any escapees. This would mean a flawed operation and damage their image and pride as being efficient murderers doing the work of the divine. The Germans went on patrols at night. They would run around the woods hunting for escaped prisoners. We organized to try to help the ones that ran away.

One night an escapee came to our house. We took him in and put him to rest for the night in my room. I could not sleep in the house. The Germans knew the number of family members in each Jewish household specifically to prevent this from occurring. For this to go undetected I slept in our barn in the hay.

In order to survive we had to live one day at a time and watch out for the bullets. My parents never discussed their problems and the Germans. They thought it was impossible to survive. We'd always assume we'd be dead in the next hour or the next day. We all assumed we'd be dead sooner than later. To most people it was not a question of "if" but "when." A lot of people lost all faith and hope and died. My little brother gave up. He was too young to fight, too young to be able to do something.

I remember a conversation that I had with my Grandpa.

"Chaim." He said. "Come sit on my lap. I want to tell you a little story about you when you were a tiny baby, about only one year old."

"O.K." I said and I went over and sat on his lap.

"That's my boy." He said as he adjusted me on his legs. "Well, when you were first born you were not a healthy baby. In fact you were sick most of the time. We were all very worried about you, we did not know what to do. There were as there are now, no doctors in our village. One night after dinner your Mother, Father and I were around the kitchen table as we usually were discussing the most important family matters. That was of course you. We debated how we could help our first born baby boy's ailments for hours and hours to make him healthy. Nothing was more important. I came up with the idea that I would take you to see the Rabbi of the village. This was a very sacred man and if anybody could help you it would be him. This was or best chance to have you receive whatever help you could.

The very next day I took you over to the Synagogue to meet with the Rabbi. When I picked you up and put you in the arms of the Rabbi he said 'Chaim will be fine. Go home, you have nothing to worry about. He will live to a ripe old age.'

From that moment on I did not worry any more. I knew that you would be fine. The family's prayers had been answered."

My Grandfather would always remind me of this story. I do not know how many times I heard it. And each time he told me this story he said "Don't you forget your blessing." My Grandfather really did believe this Rabbi like a prophecy from G-d himself. It sounds crazy but that's the way it was back then.

*March of 1940,*

The conditions were always getting worse. For the first few months the Polish were basically indifferent about the situation. But then they started to act miserably against the Jewish people. Within six months after the initial invasion the Germans had taken everything. They took away the farms and cattle of all the Jews. The Germans took so much of our harvest that we were hungry most of the time and there was nothing we could do. I believed living was still worth fighting for. I managed somehow for a potato or a little piece of bread here and there. What I ate was taken from gentile farmers whose fields I tended. They were the only people allowed to grow and keep most of their food.

*Summer of 1940, (?)*

*Fall of 1940, (?)*

*Winter of 1940 to 1941,*

The snow was 4 feet high. The only feasible and reliable way of staying warm was the exercise, slave labor, our captors forced upon us. By now we were all starving, we were not fed at all. We were freezing and starving.

### CHAPTER 3 LIFE AFTER INITIAL OCCUPATION

*Spring of 1942,*

We barely survived the Winter. All of us were very sick and famished. This season is a symbol of rebirth and new life. It was also the beginning of a new year. Our spirits were lifted with the hope that we had survived the worst of times and now life would start to improve.

*April 1942; the day before Easter,*

I heard a train roll in along the rails to our village. It stopped at the Sobibor train station. I assumed this to be just another of the many German trains that went through this area. Since the Germans had invaded our village they used this station primarily as a means for transporting troops and supplies. I did not think much of this at first.

Not too much later I noticed some movement coming from the area of the train station. I looked through the woods and down the road and noticed that it was a group of Germans soldiers. They walked right into our village and all split up. They went into the houses of all the Jewish people. They collected all the Jewish men and took them out and lined up outside. About twenty five men were then chosen for labor. The Germans then took the prisoners back to the train station.

By coincidence I went by the train station the next day and saw what was going on. I saw a freight train. It was plain and simple, about twenty cars long. I more

importantly saw the men. They were unloading the contents of the train. There were long pieces of lumber, huge plots of bricks, spools and spools of shiny bright glittering brilliant barbed wire and other building materials. The prisoners were bringing what they unloaded to an area about two hundred feet away from the station itself. I did not stay too long because the SS was around and Jewish people did not want to be around where the SS was around.

This was the first time the Germans had ever brought and unloaded materials such as this to the train station. I did not know what the Germans were planning to do. I thought they were going to forest the area and this was going to be a storage place. Maybe they could have been building a housing structure for the Army. In the beginning I nor anyone else knew or had any idea of what was going on. In fact nobody thought much of what was going on at the time.

This labor went on for three to four days. After that the Germans went all throughout the town of Wlodava which was about eight kilometers away from my village and took over one hundred additional Jewish carpenters, masons and other crafts men. The Germans had brought everything at once. They had everything all planned out. The Germans knew exactly what they were doing.

The men shortly began construction. By the layout of all the materials it was possible to see the enormous size of what ever was going to be built. The construction was adjacent to and made to be an extension of the train station. It was all connected. I realized that this was going to be a major compound.

It was incredible to watch the progression of what was being built. The building began to take shape. As time went on I started to see more and more of the building and it started to reveal more and more of itself and its purpose. We started to consider this more seriously. Everyone in the village tried to figure out what the Germans were up to and what their plans would entail.

*June of 1942,*

It took eight weeks and infinite torturous and murderous man hours to construct this fortress. In the center was a large building. I had no idea what was its purpose. Around this citadel were neatly organized rows and rows of buildings. And surrounding all of this was what seemed like endless stripes of barbed wire ten feet tall bolted to large concrete pillars. Large overbearing watch towers interrupted this monotonous pattern of glittering fortified and threatening separation. Outside of this large and hellish construction was a relatively small and insignificant looking innocent building. It looked as if it was just a forgotten last minute fragmentation of the larger construction as if it was



forgotten and just added this an afterthought. This is what was being built no more than a mile from my house. "What is this?" I continually asked myself.

With this now completed everyone in the village was now about to learn the truth and the answer to their questions. I learned the plans of the Germans and the purpose of their creation from the blood sweat and tears of the Jewish people. What I was to learn was the most shocking and horrific thing I could have never imagined. I could not believe it.

I learned, this was Sobibor, the Death Camp. The Jewish people were forced to build their own tool of destruction. The first testing of systematical killings in our village had begun. The initial test victims forced through the death machine were those one hundred twenty-five men who had built it. They were gassed in the chambers they had built and burned in and by the ovens they had installed. The first day of operation the SS killed 1,300 Jewish people.

#### *August of 1942,*

We all learned about the incomprehensible process the Germans used to execute their prisoners. The main building was a series of rooms and compartments containing gas chambers which would spew out poisonous chemicals in a locked room which would overcome its victims and kill them. Then there were the ovens which were no ordinary ovens but specially designed ovens large enough to contain multiple human bodies to destroy the evidence of the innocent people who had been killed. The barracks were used to hold the prisoners until the day of death. The barbed wire and pillars were meant to contain the Jewish people to not let them escape, and if they tried the soldiers in the watch towers would see this fight for survival and end that through the working end of high powered rifles. The little building outside of all this was anything but an innocent and unplanned building. This was the contrived and calculating office of operations for the death camp adjacent to it.

Time went on and on and as time went on the trains brought prisoners, a lot of prisoners to our town. Trains came with mostly Polish and German Jewish prisoners. We knew which prisoners were Jewish by the yellow star sewn onto the clothes. These prisoners though were kept separate from other prisoners. Even in the face of death racism and segregation was at an all time high. The Germans never gave up. All of these people were going to die. "Why did the Germans bother separating these victims?" I asked myself.

In the Jewish religion uniqueness is supported but there are three times during the life of a Jewish person that he or she is the same as every other Jewish person: birth,

everyone is naked; marriage, only plain gold bands are allowed to be exchanged; and death, all Jewish people are buried in a plain white cloth, no jewelry or fancy clothing.

Some prisoners were spared their lives to work in the village. The rest continued the voyage to the crematorium. Naturally everyone wanted to run away but they were always surrounded. Some people tried to run away but they were shot down for their attempts at freedom. The few that managed to escape ran east, miles away from the densely guarded Bug River area to villages which contained few or no Germans.

We were aware of the murder. Trains came in full and left empty. We used to hear the screaming and the shooting. When we were in the village we used to smell the burning. The soldiers would say to us "Do you smell that? It will be you some day soon!" People of the villages would say that we were next. There was nothing we could do. There was no where to go. We could not go in the train. We could not run because we needed passports and all we had were papers saying we were Jews and if we were found we would have been killed.

I was surrounded by Enemies. The guards, farmers and people were all against us. The feelings of the people about the Jews were "Find him, catch him, and kill him." The Polish and Ukrainian civilians were horrible. They just followed suit right along with the Nazis. Sometimes they went out of their way to help the Nazis and would go out of their own way and get pleasure and satisfaction out of their actions.

All we could do was try to survive. We were trying to survive while fellow Jewish and other people were shipped in like cattle during harvest time and sent off to the slaughter house or in this case the gas chambers and ovens. This was the time of the devil and he was out to plunder all that he could.

Life was horrible and continued on this downward path. Things were never getting better, always worse. Until it had become the worst it ever had.

*October of 1942,*

One cold, cloudy and gray Saturday in the early morning over a loudspeaker in the village, the Germans ordered "All Jews go to the center of town!" Right after that message German soldiers and a mob of citizens ran throughout the entire village into our houses and chased us out. We were marched to the town of Wlodawa over eight kilometers away through the wet mucky woods. On the way some people hid. But where were they going to go? They were going to go nowhere except to the train. If they tried to stay in the woods around here they would surely have been caught. People were struggling with luggage, baggage, clothing so they would be as prepared as possible. It didn't make sense to bring anything; we knew where we were going, but some people did

anyway. Eventually our trek was over and by the time we arrived at the Town's train station it was raining and snowing.

Upon our arrival we were all pushed, kicked and shoved into a tiny area near the tracks overlooked by many armed guards. Blows from the butts of German rifles were exacted as a means of crowd control. After we all were herded together we were forced to sit down in the muddy wet ground. We were not allowed to stand, just to sit still and wait for the train. Fortunately I was sitting with my family. There were more than ten thousand Jewish people all gathered together. We were all surrounded by armed guards and kept until two o'clock in the afternoon.

We knew now it was our time to board the trains and go to the place where so many others like us before had gone but never returned. The only evidence of these people were their screams and the sight and smell of the burning smoke going to heaven. The black burning smoke of hell fueled by the blood of innocents was ironically, yet purposefully going to a place more calm than from where they had left from. If their fellow man would not accept them their creator would.

I noticed my next door neighbor, Weihryp sitting next to us. He was a very educated man. Like a Rabbi, he was a learner and researcher who mostly sat at his desk and studied all the time. He did not work physically more than he had to, just enough to survive. He maintained just a large enough garden, and a few cows. This enabled him to learn as much as he could. That was until the Germans came and then he had to work.

We hadn't eaten anything all day. After realizing how hungry I was I noticed he had a piece of bread. I asked my sister, she was a little girl about three years old by now, "Do you think Weihryp would give us each a piece of his bread if we ask?"

"I don't know?" Then she asked him, "May I have a piece of bread?"

To our pleasure he said "Yes, sure!" He then gave her a piece of his bread, and then gave me also a piece.

My little sister, while eating her measly scrap of bread said to me "Such a little short piece to live and you can still eat?" I understood what she meant. She did not know how to say "Such a short time to live and you can still eat." She was very perceptive for her age or any age for that matter.

I answered her question "I can still eat because I am so hungry and famished I don't care." I was numb to impending death.

After eating my piece of bread I wanted to talk more to this man mainly about this faith. I asked him "Where is that G-d you were praying to?"

He responded "You try and he'll help you."

"Where can we run? How can we get away? Where are we going to run? No room to run, no room to live, run to gun." I asked this of the man while being surrounded by Nazi guards with rifles in their hands just waiting for an excuse to shoot one of us.

Meanwhile there was a large soldier who constantly said to us as if what he was saying was a meaningless joke "Do you know where you are going? There's not two hours left in your lives, you'll all be dead." They were so cruel. They would shoot their guns into the crowd of the children, and all the people. Wherever the bullet hit you it hit you. They just did it for the kicks. Equally cruel it was totally random opposite to the killing in the death camps.

I heard a sound off in the distance and realized it was the train. The train came in at five thirty. It was not day and not yet night, it was the twilight. It pulled up right along side of us. We were then ordered into the trains. Some people hesitated and refused but the Germans beat those people until they climbed into the trains. Most people just wept and unwillingly and regretfully accepted their fate. The older people were disoriented and the children just cried along with their parents not really knowing the reason they were crying except that their parents were and that was enough of a reason.

I grabbed on to my family in this hectic and catastrophic crowd. While in the flood and current of people I managed to glance over and look at the whole family as a group. My mom, she had tears in her eyes and was sobbing as was my sister who was in her arms. She was crying too. My two brothers were right by her side. They were also teary eyed but tried not to show it the best they could. I guess they were trying to be strong for their mom. I believe this act of was one of the strongest display of strength and courage of displayed throughout the war. I wish everyone could have seen this. I was so proud of them. My Grandpa was next to them. My eyes caught his and it was like looking right at a person who really was not looking at anything at all, just staring blankly off into the distance. My father was holding up at the back with his arms around the family trying the best he could to protect us. I was all over just trying to stick together with my family. This entire glance only lasted but a second in time but in my mind it seemed like hours. We were then all pushed forward in the giant wave of people towards the train.

My entire family boarded together in the same car. Once all ten thousand Jewish people were loaded into the cars the doors were locked and we were ready to go on our voyage to the devils pit of fire. The Germans packed us in like cattle in the box cars. That was all we were to the Germans; expendable worthless objects worthy of being shipped off to be destroyed for their own benefit. The train was horrendous. The smell of death and disease was all throughout the train. There was waste all over the floor. I could hardly move. I could hardly breathe. We were packed so tight I did not have the space to

breathe. My whole body was compressed so tight I could not inhale a full breath. The little bit of air I managed, I tried not to inhale through my nose, but no matter what I did, I could not escape that smell. Death was in the air.

I was now facing death right in the face. I was able to sense it in every part of my body. I saw the dark suffering silhouettes of the people. I smelled the decay. I tasted the air, it was so thick. I felt the squeezing, struggling and grasping of death. I heard the groans and prayers for life. Death was everywhere.

I heard a loud screech and felt a jerk throughout the cars. The trains had started to roll. We had begun our voyage. I could not believe it. I was in shock. After all the years living under the control of the Germans I never really believed that this would happen. I mean I was always afraid of dying but yet I truly never imagined dying in this way as a possibility. I always thought I would have starved to death, frozen to death during the Winter or shot by an overzealous German guard. I had survived all that. The impossible. But now I was certain my luck and life was over. Death was an electricity flowing through every car, every person and every heart beat. It was inescapable. We were all now on our way to our final destination.

As I was thinking how hopeless my and everyone else's life was I overheard two men talking. They were talking about jumping out from the train and running away.

One man said "Look at the top of the car. There is an open space." The man was referring to a window to allow some circulation for the livestock that this car was planned for.

Then the other man asked "But what about the bars covering this open space enclosing the car?"

"They are old and rusty we can bust them out somehow."

"Even if we did bust out the bars what about the Germans on top cars guarding the train. They would either hear or see us and then..."

"That is not an issue tonight because it is raining and the Germans are not going to be manning their usual positions." This was a major obstacle that was not a factor. The men were then able focus on the impossible feat itself.

I could not believe my ears. First I thought they were crazy, but then I started thinking of the possibilities. I was overcome with excitement. Just a minute ago I was thinking to myself "There is nothing I can do and I am surely on my way to death." Maybe now there is a way out and I can escape and possibly survive!

The men put their plan into action. They smashing and ripping at the bars and its attached parts to the train with their fists and arms. Blow after blow, strike after strike they pelted that metal with total and utter disregard for their bodies because that was

exactly what they were fighting for. The men continued their assault on the bars of death with a superhuman ferocity. They persisted with the power and fury of G-d. Graced with G-d speed they gained more and more speed and force with each bone crunching strike. With each impact I would hear bones breaking and shattering. Their hands were mangled, bleeding and broken, totally demolished destroyed reduced to limp stumps. It was a horrible and trying sight but at the same time the most inspiring fight showing just how much courage and will they possessed despite all that they had been through.

Within two miles of the train ride I heard a sharp crack. The men had broken out the rusty bars and opened up the little space. It was amazing. A sudden breeze of fresh air overcame the entire car. The cool night air was a welcome presence. People who were hopelessly silent all let out a sigh of minor relief but then went back to their quiet selves as if nothing had happened. But something had happened, something major. The men without a second thought started their way out. One pushed the other up and then climbed out. Then the man who had climbed out pulled his friend up into the darkness. They were gone.

People had no sense of reality. They were screaming out "Because you people are jumping out they are going to kill us all!" This just made me realize even more how much I wanted to escape this train. After watching these men I squeezed and struggled my way to under this portal to freedom. My mom handed me her earrings and wedding band. I took one glance back looking at my family. That moment, that second has been the most vibrant memory of my family. It is like a picture permanently ingrained in my mind. It was the last picture I knew of my family. Then my father pushed me up. I pulled myself up higher and the rest of the way out. Someone screamed out to me "Jump in the direction of the train it is your only chance. If you don't you will surely be killed!" I truly did not think that I was going to survive the jump. With this in mind I still believed that it was better than dying in the gas chambers.

I looked back through the hole and all I saw was a large dark mass of people and what was going to happen to them. I was standing on the top of the car. The wind was in my face pushing me back into the train. But that was not where I wanted to go. I wanted to go to freedom. I stepped to the edge of the train. I looked straight out at the full moon that was intermittently blocked by the foliage of the woods. The blinking of the moon's light and the blur of the trees put me in a trance and my deep focus on survival took me over. I was on the border of definite death and a chance for life and I was going to go for it. Now in a hypnotic state of mind I placed my two shaking feet over the edge of the train and jumped!

## CHAPTER 4

### BEGINNING OF LIFE IN THE WOODS

I flew through the night air for what seemed like a life time. I was head over heels swirling. I pulled myself into the fetal position. I did not even realize I was doing this. It was nothing I could have planned for. It was just a reflex. While in this vortex the air was shoving me back, I felt its force pushing against me as it slowed me down. The sound of the wind as it swept past me deafened my ears to the point where I was just able to discern the whistling of the train as it struggled along its path to oblivion. While in the air I thought of my family and what was going to happen to them. I wondered if what I did was right. I wondered if I was a coward for not accepting my punishment like the rest of my family and neighbors were. I wondered if G-d would have approved of what I was doing.

This introspection must have only lasted a couple of seconds because no sooner did I feel the force of gravity overtaking me. I crashed right into the ground. I spun and rolled into the brush that was about fifty feet away from the tracks and caught by a most effective living net, a bush. My breath was knocked right out of me. I thought I was never going to breathe again. I felt as if something was pushing in against my stomach preventing me from inhaling. I could not move my body. It was in shock from the impact. It was a very scary feeling. I was cut up all over my body but the wounds were relatively minor.

I eventually regained the ability to breathe and move my body. I found myself still paralyzed in the fetal position. I stretched out of the ball I was constrained in and began ever so carefully and slowly to lie flat on my back. My body was so sore all over. I felt each and every muscle as I moved. When I came back to life it was like breaking out of a shell.

It took me nearly five minutes to collect myself. I immediately said a prayer for my family and prayed that whatever was going to happen to them would be as painless as possible. I could not fool myself. I knew, just as well as anyone else on the train, the fate of its passengers. From above this must have looked like the devil's rolling metal snake-like tool which consumed and transported all of the prisoners in its belly only to expel them into their final destination in the camps.

I rolled over on to my belly. Then I pulled my legs under my torso and I then put my arms out to my side palms down and pushed down on the ground, lifting my chest up. I was now half way up but not in full control of my faculties. After resting from this movement I pulled my right knee up to my chest now placing one of my feet flat on the ground. This was extremely painful because my whole upper body was now contracted and tight. Not being able to stand the pain of this position I thrust my left arm to the branch of the same bush which halted my crash. I grabbed on to it with all my might and then I clasped the wrist of that arm with my right hand. With one giant explosion of energy I pulled on both arms with all the strength I had left in me while at the same time extending my bent right leg and jerking the left leg to catch up. I stretched both legs out and wrapped both arms around the branch. I made it. I was now standing on my feet. I just needed some time to recuperate.

I eventually regained my sense of balance. I stumbled to stand straight up. I planted my feet firmly in the ground. I stood up straight and took a deep breath inhaling the cool, sweet, crisp, fresh air. For the first time I took notice of my surroundings. I realized there was nothing but dark trees, shadows and what had created them. After looking up at the heavens and orienting myself I took inventory of my wounds and said to myself "It's not that bad! I will live!" I achingly brushed the leaves, branches and dirt off of my body and clothes and tended to a few minor cuts and scrapes.

I assessed what had just happened. I was surprised and grateful to still be alive. I felt as if I was a cat because they always survive such jumps. I was still debating if what I had done was the right thing to do. After much thought I reassured myself "Yes, I did the right thing because this was the only chance I would have to live another day and possibly win my fight for survival." I was now on my own. In the wild. No where to go. No one



to see. I had no idea what would happen here in the woods in the next hour or day or even months. I had no idea how long I would live. I had no idea of anything.

Living under German control was terrible, but at the very least there were no surprises. We knew our punishment if we were to make a false step. We knew that we would either be beaten or killed. We were adapted to this way of life and in some way accustomed ourselves to the static life of a slave. Life was a constant hell. But now life is going to be different, much different. Life was never going to be the same again. It was going to be a constantly changing and dynamic life. How was this going to effect my life, I wondered. Was this going to be for the worse or the better? Then I realized that whatever did happen to me was better than what would have definitely happened to me if I had stayed on that train. I found hope and a revitalized desire to live. This was more than I had in the camp. I had a chance at freedom. I had a chance for survival. I am going to play it out as long and as hard as I can. Let them kill me when I'm running. I am going to fight! I am going to give life the best chance I can!

I did not want to waste any time. I realized I could not just stand here if I wanted to survive. It was cold and dark out. The air was silent. It was just me in the woods. I needed to do something. I had to run away. But where was I going to run. I decided to create the first of my many strategies to survive. I decided to run to a farmer whose cows I had watched over in the village. This house was very far away, especially considering that I could not see where I was going. I was familiar with the stars and was able to tell basically where I was and where I had to go. Navigating my way by the sky I began my voyage through the sea of black air and trees. Walking was not so easy. I was in a lot of pain from the fall and it was not going away any time fast. It felt like every step the pain got worse. But I kept on going. I ignored the pain the best I could by putting it in the back of my mind trying not to be conscious of it. I ran, tripped and stumbled my throughout the night. The cold night air numbed my face, hands and even the pain some what. I struggled through the dark brush and freezing cold for at least three hours and I felt dead!

I climbed over a slight hill and spotted the area I needed to reach. From this point I knew I was close. I saw the property from a distance and not much longer was at the property of the man. There was a fence around his property so I had to climb over it. Nothing could stop me. I felt a burst of energy and popped over that obstacle. I walked right across his yard and went right to the house. I marched up the front steps to the front door and knocked on it. I felt so strange. I was at some bodies house at what must have been in the very early morning hours. Each knock on the wooden front door felt like a punch on my frozen bare knuckles. I continued to knock. I hoped someone was home.

Where else could they have been. Then after almost losing all hope and starting to walk down off the porch I heard a voice say "Who is it?"

The door had opened. Yes! I felt warmth all throughout my body. The wife of the farmer had answered and I told her what had just happened. She said "Go sit there in the barn and wait and hide."

I did as she said and walked around the house to the barn. I opened the large doors, walked in and then closed the doors behind me. It was nice in there. A lot nicer than outside. There were a couple horses and chickens in stalls. There was also a corner full of hay and feed. This was the perfect place to keep warm and rest for a while. I jumped right into the hay, threw some of it up in the air and covered myself. I pulled up a sack of grain and rested my head on it. My fingers, toes and nose started to warm up. I could feel the warm blood rush back into them. It was a wonderful feeling. I felt so safe. I felt so warm. I felt so good. I felt so relieved. I felt so happy. I felt so tired. Not much later, I felt myself falling asleep. Now I had some peace.

Later in the early morning hours I was woken up abruptly. A man was shaking me and told me to wake up. I was scared. I thought it was the Germans. I thought they had found me. I started to scream. I then heard the voice say "Calm down! You are not in danger! I am not going to hurt you!" Then I started to focus in on the voice and face and realized it was the wife's husband.

I was so happy to see him rather than a German. But this relief did not last long as the farmer explained to me his motives. "I am really sorry. But I am worried about my wife and I. If the Germans find you here in our barn we will-well you know."

I said "I understand." I really did.

He said to me "You should run away."

I reluctantly said "Fine." I was so comfortable. This was the last thing I wanted to do. But I had to. The man was right. This was my problem not his. I did not argue with him because he was telling the truth. If the Germans had found me taking shelter in his barn we all would have faced the same consequence. Death.

I crawled out of the hay, stood up and brushed it off. I looked at him one last time. I thought of all of the good work I had done for this man. And this is what he is doing to me. Oh, well. If that was not bad enough he said to me as I walked out "Good luck boy." That was like adding salt to a wound. I was pretty angry now and not so understanding.

I mumbled a "Thanks."

I was out in the cold again. I could feel the cold biting at me instantly. Right back to where I started from. It seemed even colder than before. It probably was, due to the

fact that it was later in the cold, dark early morning hours. Earlier in the night I was too in shock from my jump and numb from the cold to realize the extent of my hunger. Now I was warm and sensitive to these other needs. I could not believe how hungry I was. I had to get somewhere fast and get some food before I starved or froze to death.

I ran throughout the early morning hours. About an hour later of wandering the woods I arrived at another farm with which I was familiar. I crept into the barn. I searched around for a while looking for anything to eat. I heard some squeaking. It could have been nothing other than mice. I was sure they were feasting on a midnight snack. They could lead me to some food. I followed their sounds and sure enough came across a sack of horse grain that they were feasting on. I pushed my hand into the sack and pulled out a fist full of oats. They were not a bad find. I was so hungry I shoved into my mouth and with such a ferocity that I almost choked. They were so dry and I had nothing to drink. So I coughed the food out of my mouth. I went back outside and gathered up some snow that had fallen during the my night adventures. After ingesting this feed I gathered up some hay and retired in a caccoon for the rest of the morning.

I woke up later in the day after the sun had come up. I stretched my muscles and as I did my body twitched in pain and my arms and legs shot back to a less stressed position. As I stood up I felt like a man of one hundred years or so. I also felt even more intense hunger pangs in my stomach. I balled my fists up and rubbed my eyes. As my eyes cleared I realized just how late I had slept. The farmer had already come in and completed his chores. He had fed the chickens and harvested their eggs. An explosion of questions and ideas popped into my head all at once. I thought Oh, my G-d! This man must have definitely seen me. How could he not have? I can't believe this! Is this some sort of a mistake? I am clearly still alive. Am I? Oh, yes sure I am. What is going on?

I walked out of the barn ever so cautiously. I wanted to run away before I pressed my luck. Then all of a sudden I heard "Hey! Young man! Come over here! I am not going to hurt you. Don't run away! Come here."

I turned around. I was caught. There was a large man no more than ten yards away from me. Could I make it from here? Could I out run this man? Maybe if I had not jumped out of a train the night before. But not now, not in the terrible shape I was in. I did not know what to do. I was wondering if this was a set up. But if this man really wanted to hurt me he had the perfect opportunity while I was sleeping. I figured this man was sincere. This was a huge bet. But if his actions before were any proof of his intentions, they were decent. Since I could not outrun this man and he had not killed me yet I figured I had a fair chance of not being sabotaged.

I walked up to him and he said "Hey son are you all right?"

Am I hearing this man correctly? I asked myself in wonder. I could not imagine somebody was concerned how I was after what I've been through. "I am not that bad" I replied.

"Would you like to come in to the house and cleaned up a little and get some food to eat? You look like you could use it."

"I reluctantly yet thankfully and hopefully said "Yes." I followed the man into his house. When I entered he pointed me over to a pot of water where I could clean up. I took my shirt off and washed it because it had gotten pretty dirty and I did not know the next time I would have such an opportunity. While I was cleaning myself I noticed that most of my body had turned black and blue since the night. I had not noticed this until now and I was very shocked.

The farmer walked into the room and took notice of my back. He said "What happened to you?"

I said "I had a very bad fall. But I am fine."

"All right." He did not ask any further questions about that.

A couple minutes later I had cleaned all I could. I felt a lot better both physically and mentally. The washing off of the dirt also washed away some pain but not much. I walked into the kitchen and said "Thank you." to the man.

He said "Sure." and then handed me a loaf of bread.

Wow! This was really great! I said "Thank you" again. I assured him I would not overstay my welcome and that "I will go to the other side of the Bug River." I stayed a little bit longer and then left his house grateful that nothing bad had happened and only good things resulted. He was not a bad guy.

I was now on my way to my next adventure. Along the way of growing up so close to the Ukraine I learned some of that tongue. I figured I spoke enough Ukrainian to be able to get around that land safely and know what was going on. I decided to pose as a native in that land because nobody there would recognize me. Taking my chances in another land was a lot safer than staying where I had been running around in the Polish woods. There were not as many patrol guards hunting for Jewish people in the Ukrainian villages. In fact one of my father's best friends owned a farm over in that country not too far from the border I had to cross. I decided to go there. In order to get into this country though I had to cross the huge Bug River. This was going to be one of the greatest challenges I would ever have to face.

I crept through the woods all day and came close but was unable to make it all the way to the Bug River. Night had fallen so I took shelter in a hole next to a tree and covered myself with some fallen leaves. I woke up early the next morning. The sun was

just coming up and I could tell it was going to be a bright and sunny day. I was well rested and felt better.

I began my walk to the Bug River and made it there no more than an hour later. The Bug River is 300 to 400 feet wide. The current is very strong and dangerous. I stood right at the edge of the water just enough so that my toes were wet from the water. I did not know if I could make it. But I knew if I did, life might be a little bit easier and not as hectic. I said to myself "Now or never." I tried to negotiate for the current and ran about one hundred yards upstream of my destination.

I began my walk into the bone chilling water. Each step I went in a little deeper. My ankles, knees, waist, chest and neck. I felt every inch of that water creep up my body. The current pulled harder and harder on my body. By twenty feet into the water I was swept off my feet and I had to swim. I was pulled down river at an unexpected rate. I was like a broken limb floating in the mercy of the water. I knew I could not fight the current so I swam with it at an angle towards the other shore. I was so worried about being consumed and overwhelmed by this river's ferocity. Foot by foot I made my way over. Then after I thought I was never going to reach the other side I felt something hit my foot. I felt it again. Now I felt both of my feet hit something. It was the ground. I knew I was close. But I had to keep on swimming. Finally after another flurry of strokes I caught on to a tree that had been knocked over into the river. I slowly, against the current sucking me out and under, pulled myself from the grips of the river. The water was like ice but somehow I made it safely to the other side. I landed about one hundred yards down river from the spot I wanted to land. I was just glad to get out of the water. The man's farm was not more than an eighth of a mile away from the Bug River. I began my way over to his house.

It was now Seven o' clock Sunday morning. I had arrived at the farm and went right up to the house. I knocked on the door and the farmer opened it. This man recognized me. I knew because of the strange yet familiar look on his face. Even though I was the son of a man who had a familiarity, association and friendship with this man, the first thing he said to me was "You have nice shoes and I would like them."

I was suspicious, so I said to him "I have another pair outside and that I'll bring them to you." This was obviously a lie, but I told him what ever I could to make him take me into his house and give me a piece of bread.

He said "Let me feed you." I assumed he regained some manners after recovering from the shock of seeing me and started to be nicer. He sat me down at his kitchen table and made me a bowl of soup and some bread. Then he said "Stay right here and enjoy your food. I will be right back."

"Sure," I said. But then I noticed through the corners of my ever vigilant eyes that he walked to his little girl and was talking to her. When the secret conversation was over she ran out of the house like a bat out of hell.

He did not realize I noticed what he was doing. I was not sure but I had in mind that he was up to something bad that might possibly result in my capture and worse. I realized I had an important decision to make. I could stay believing this was a friendly man telling his daughter an innocent secret and risk my life. Or I could run away believing this was a deceitful man telling his daughter to go retrieve some Germans and risk a meal. I weighed out the consequences of each and realized it might be difficult to find another meal but that was sure easier than finding another life.

I was lucky with one farmer already and did not want to push it. I decided it would be in my best interest if I were to leave this situation quickly. I saw an escape route right behind the house. I leaped up from the table leaving a perfectly good meal only on a suspicion and jumped out from the house through the back door. I ran to the Bug River which was, in a straight line about 200 to 300 feet away. Although that was not a very far distance once my heart started pumping and I believing I was running for my life my mind was going the speed of sound and it felt like miles. I ran back into the Bug, water splashing everywhere and as soon as I could not run any more I dove into the freezing river. So far this was all for a hunch.

While crossing the river this same little girl returned running with Germans! One German was screaming "Halt! Halt! Halt!". I was in the middle of the river by the time they reached the River's edge. They did not have guns, or else they would have shot at me. They were screaming so loud. The girl was screaming so loud. Her father the farmer had now come to the river's edge to see what was going on and if I had been caught. He was so crazed he started running up and down the bank and almost jumped in the freezing water to come after me. I could not believe it. But I had surely out run them. I was pretty safe now. I eventually made it to the other side of the river. It was still extremely cold and I guess if it had not been moving water it would have been frozen ten feet thick!

I crawled out of the river on my hands and knees. I was coughing and choking from the water I had ingested during my swim for life. I decided I could not take much more of anything for the rest of the day so I hid in some bushes in the woods until the night. While hiding in the woods I thought to myself how close I came to being caught by the Germans. I mean my life rested on one decision based on a hunch and a feeling. I was so grateful to still be alive. I prayed to G-d that my good fortune would continue.

When it was dark enough, I made my way to another farmer's barn for the night. In the morning the son of the farmer became aware of my presence. I was in a state

between being awake and asleep so I noticed him just as he was coming over to me. I saw that he was not a small person but not a big person either. I was not so afraid of him. When he walked up to me he said "Get out of here."

"No!" I said. "Let me stay!"

He replied. "If you don't leave I will tell my father!"

I said "I don't care!"

He left the barn, followed through on his word and informed his father. The farmer told his son to tell me to leave. The boy returned and relayed the message. He said "My father said you must leave."

"I want to stay" I said.

He said "I'll be back!" and left.

He returned with orders and a large stick in his hand. He said "My dad told me to beat you with a stick or kill you. Whatever it takes to get you off the property."

I shot up and ran to hide in a corner of the barn. I was ironically reminded of the games I would play with my brothers, hide and seek. But I learned this was no game I had ever played before. In fact this was not a game at all, this was a fight for survival. Running into this corner was not a good idea. I had a pathetic hiding place if I had one at all. I heard the boy searching for me. I saw him walk right up to me. I had cornered myself. When the boy found me he said "If you don't run away I will kill you!" I could tell by the way he was staring, swinging that stick and catching it in his hand and yelling at me that he meant business. I was scared. I did not have much of a choice except to run or be beaten. I did not say anything. I got up and ran away as fast as my legs would move me.

Again I traversed the labyrinth of trees and wild in the woods for another place to find some food and shelter. I found exactly that when I came across the next farmer. He was very nice to me. He fed me and let me stay in his barn atop some hay. I stayed with this farmer in what seemed to be the lap of luxury. The third day was Saturday morning I went for a walk. I was in the woods really doing nothing. In fact I really should not have been running about and risk being caught. While on my walk I heard some movement and the crushing of the wood's floor. Then I heard what sounded like human mumbling from a distance. I could not distinguish what was being said.

I immediately found a hiding place under some brush. If this were a group of German patrol guards I was prepared so that they would not find me. They were coming right my way. My heart started beating faster and faster. The sounds got louder and louder. The voices became more distinguishable. I realized who these people were. Then as if I had been a fire ready to explode, all my flames had just been doused with water.

Amazingly by chance I came across some other escapees! They were in the same situation I was. In glee I jumped out! I scared the daylights-out of them. But I did not care I was so happy. They all let out screams but in Polish I said "Hello! Hello! Hello!"

They soon realized I was an escapee just like them. We all came together greeted one another. It was such a wonderful moment. We all cheered and ran around in excitement.

Then we all realized our surroundings and the fact that we could not scream like this for fear that a German would hear us. A whole blanket of seriousness came over us. We quieted down and calmed down. It was hard to do considering the circumstances but necessary. After we caught our breath and regained composure we started to talk.

We had a very serious conversation. Some of the men who I had met had jumped off of the same train I did. I thought that was amazing! At a moment of hope I asked the men if they knew of any others who had jumped off the train. I was thinking of my father. I was hoping he had jumped out. I was hoping if that was the case one of the men had seen him do so. But they said they did not know of any others. Oh well, it was worth asking.

We mostly talked about how and where to find bread. We talked about how to live through and survive another day. In retrospect we talked about everything and nothing. We discussed all of our experiences and our theories on what was going on. We discussed what was happening all over the country. It was pretty much the same everywhere. The Germans were taking control of everything. They were rounding up all of the Jewish people and sending them to slave camps. We were all able to discuss and get off our chest what we would not be able to with others. Nobody else could have understood. But we did. We talked for some time. This was the best therapy we could have imagined. We felt so relieved and maybe at peace for we were able to share and solve together what was necessary. This felt good to the mind and body. I felt as if my mind had been organized. Lingering questions had been answered and a ton of pressure and anxiety was released.

Then they informed me that there were still Jews in the town of Wlodava living in the ghettos. I believed them because I had been aware of ghettos ever since 1940. No later than six months after the Germans had taken control of this area of Poland did they create ghettos. I had known that ghetto was an area where Jewish people were forced to live by the Germans. But I never really thought of them too much. I was too worried about finding a piece of bread to eat. There were no ghettos in the small villages around where I lived but there were in the large towns. These ghettos were transformed parts of towns set apart for Jewish people only. This did not mean people could live freely and not



in fear. The escapees told me more about the prisons known as ghettos. They proceeded to tell me the following. Wlodava contained two ghettos. These were the only places Jewish people were accepted.

The non-working ghetto was at one end of the town. This ghetto was similar to a part of town where the lower class citizens lived. People came here on their own. They really had no other choice if they did not want to run around in the woods. It housed over two thousand Jewish prisoners. The people here were unable to do any slave labor. The were mothers, children and older people and some young men and fathers.

The working ghetto was at the other side of town. People had no choice in being here they had all been captured and forced to come to the ghetto. The people here were mostly young healthy men selected and forced by Germans to be slave laborers. The living area were bare military-like barracks. Over one thousand five hundred prisoners were packed in like animals. This ghetto was run exactly like a prison. There was a warden named Faltenberg who gave the orders for what was to be done where, at what time and by who. The whole ghetto fenced off with barbed wire and cement walls. It was protected by heavily armed guards. There was no escaping this place. If someone tried they were killed. These men were treated horribly. They were up before dawn, worked all day and went to sleep in the dark. They were hardly fed at all. The times they were fed were few and far between and the little bit they were fed was only to keep them alive and working. They would not have been fed at all if they could have survived and been able to work without it. If there was a hell on earth these men were living it.

I could not think of what to say after hearing all of this news. We did not have much more to discuss so we talked only a little bit longer. After we had talked about everything we could for as long as we could we all decided to get back on our way. We all hugged and said good bye and good luck. I had made up my mind. I had been running around the woods long enough and was sick of it. I decided to try life in the non-working ghetto. I was safe from the risk of being sentenced to the working ghetto because at the time I was too small. I really did not have much else of a choice in the matter. I also knew I would meet more Jewish people and maybe even family members that had escaped. With this inspiration in mind I went right on my way cautiously through the woods, ever vigilant that there were Germans looking for me at all times, towards the ghetto in Wlodava.

I made my way near my destination the next day. I saw the ghetto in the distance. From all appearances this appeared to be just any ordinary part of town. But this was not just any part of town it was a ghetto. As I came closer and closer I began to see people walking around. There was life in this ghetto. I guess for some reason I thought it was

going to be a solemn sterile place. I entered the ghetto unsure what to think, how to act or what to feel. It was like everyone had said. The ghetto consisted of a street length of small living quarters lined up adjacent to each other. The houses were stacked two and three stories tall. I walked around for a while exploring my new surroundings.

Eventually, some people noticed that I was new in the ghetto. They started talking to me and asked me where I was from. After some time of telling the people my story of where I came from and that I jumped off a train they said they might know someone with a very similar story. They took me to meet this person. They lead me to a great, wonderful, heavenly surprise and the seemingly best gift in the world.

My father! I had found my father! He was still alive! It was a miracle! I could not believe it. I saw him and then I screamed out. We both ran towards each other with open arms. We embraced and cried together. We must have hugged for at least five minutes. When we finally came apart we could not see each other clearly because our eyes were clouded with tears. We collected ourselves and went to his room to talk.

My father and I had so much to talk about. The first thing we did was pray for our entire family. We then shared what we had gone through so far. As it turned out, he had jumped out after me, but I had no way of knowing that until I had returned to the ghetto seven days later and was reunited with him. As I saw the situation I had been given back a family member from the heavens. I thought for sure I would never see my father again. But I had and this was great. Beyond great. We had both been granted the gift of life for one another.

When we finished discussing our ordeals my father gave me a tour of our house and the surrounding area. We walked throughout the house I was shown the kitchen and rooms everyone lived in. Then we went out to the back yard. I noticed our house was adjacent to another house. They were about ten feet apart and there was a walkway between the two houses. My father took me down this walkway to the partially above ground basement. The basement started halfway down the side of the houses. The entrance was about eight feet tall and sloped to six feet at the front of the houses.

My father took me down into this basement. From all appearances this was an ordinary basement. Supplies were stored here amongst other things. Except there was one difference that made this more than just a basement. Behind and under the steps leading down to the basement was a dug out hidden space. False steps and boards concealed and permitted access to the hiding place. My father said "This is where you run if there is ever a round up." He then showed me how to get into this place. He picked up the planks of woods which served as steps. He then crawled in and replaced those steps

behind him. There was even sand and dirt sprinkled over the steps to camouflage the false wall and the hiding place behind it. We then left the basement.

After this my father walked me around the ghetto. He introduced me to everyone there. He was so proud and happy to show me to everyone he knew and even those he did not. He felt like he was the king of the world.

I moved into his cramped quarters. The rooms we stayed in were barely livable. Now our family was only a fraction of what it had been. But we were going to try our hardest to prevent any further losses in this family and make the best out of the situation we had no control over.

We had some freedom. We were allowed to walk around our ghetto as any person would walk down their own street. But that was it. Sometimes we were permitted to work for other people. That was where our freedom ended. We were not allowed to leave the ghetto. If the Germans found us in the woods or in the market where everyone traded goods we would be killed.

That same Friday night my father had a dream. He shared with me the next morning. The dream involved his mother (my grandmother) who had been dead for ten years in real life.

"Chaim I had an incredible dream last night I want to share with you. You might not believe it."

"What was it about dad?"

"Well it was strange. I dreamed that I was in a room with my mother." In real life my grandmother had been dead for ten years. We had a discussion. Actually it was more of a premonition or a prediction."

"What did she say?"

"You and Chaim will be the only people to survive from your town. You will live safely and be saved."

"Really?" I said surprisingly.

"Yea." He answered.

And that was all we said about that dream. At that time the idea was impossible. We thought it was a sick joke. We felt very uncomfortable discussing such notions. Although this was a very unlikely prophecy we did find hope in the dream.

*My father told me about a practice known as a round up. A round up was a raid by German soldiers on a ghetto. (When did you first learn about roundups?) They would randomly invade these communities and "round up" as many Jewish people as they deemed was necessary. This term was coined from a practice of cattle herders which explains exactly the German's practices towards Jewish people. The metaphor between*

cattle and people in ghettos is a perfect way of interpreting what life in the ghettos was like.

Sheep, horses and cows used to live their lives free in nature able to roam and graze in huge fields unmolested by humans. Then people fenced these animals in around their very environment and created pastures. On the outside it looked as if life changed little for these animals. They had not been moved. They could continue on with their lives. The animals were still able to move around, eat and live just as they had done before but they lived in a less free area. Things may seem fine. But on the inside there are powerful motives underlying and driving the herder. The herder believes only in one objective for these animals existence. Eventually the cattle will be forced out of their enclosed isolated area and moved into yet a smaller paddock. The animals were now in a much different situation. They were still able to survive with all of life's necessities but that was all they barely had now. Little room, little food and a little life. From this one day the farmer would harvest his cattle and send it off to wherever it had to go. All for profit.

We too once roamed free. Then the Germans quarantined us in our own village. Then we had no choice but to enter into a confined area in a holding prison (ghetto) for convenient processing. Eventually we would be captured and then sent to a (Death camp) slaughter house. Human beings were harvested like animals in a "final solution" for the perceived purpose of profit from a delusion and a false promise of a better world.

*November of 1942,*

I soon learned the reality that in ghettos we were forced to live like animals in a cage always at the disposal of our captors. My father and I had been living together in the ghetto for two weeks by now. This day in particular started out just like any other day. It was morning time and there was nothing out of the ordinary. I thought I would maybe go into the market and trade some goods or hang around the ghetto and take it easy. I was just walking down the street when I heard a lot of screaming and commotion. And then I saw what I was hearing. Just as I had been told the Germans came charging into the ghetto like the psychopathic murderers they were with trucks and machine guns. Everyone knew what was happening.

What we all in the ghettos had feared so much was now a reality. This was the fifth round up in this ghetto alone. I had not been here the entire time so I had evaded the prior ones. This was my first round up. Everyone ran. In order to escape the round up my father and I grouped together with three other people. We were running for our lives and looking for a way out. We made it to a drainage pipe under the street of the ghetto.

The excess flood waters would flow and drain into these pipes so the ghetto would not flood. It was about three feet in circumference laying parallel to the ground. One by one we all crawled in and laid flat along the pipe which was half filled with water.

We did all we could do and that was just to sit in the water pipe preying, hiding and hoping that we would not be found. We were wet and cold and miserable. There was no way to be dry, warm or happy. But we had not been caught yet and we were thankful for that. The entire time we were hiding we could hear what was happening. I wish I did not hear these things but I did. Germans were screaming orders. The Jewish people were screaming out in pain.

After about half a day of laying in the water hiding we all decided to creep out of our hiding place to investigate the progress of the body hunt. We found to our amazement that the Germans were still killing and collecting prisoners. The Germans hunted for people by going through all the houses looking for hiding places.

I saw the most horrible things. The Germans were here capturing Jewish people to take them away to be killed in the death camps. Hundreds of people were collected and thrown into large groups of people guarded by armed German troops.

(How did the Germans take the captives away?)

Rounding up people was not the only thing the Germans were here to do. I saw a large group of captured Jewish people marched to an open area. The Germans handed the people shovels and forced them to dig a large and deep hole. After the hole was dug the Germans lined up these people in front of the hole. Then the people were all shot to death. Their bodies fell into the grave. The Jewish people were forced to dig their own graves. I thought it was all over but there was one more act the Germans inflicted on another human.

There was a three year old boy around this area. He was walking around in shock. A German officer noticed this child and ordered him thrown in the grave along with the men who had just been shot. A German soldier followed the orders and picked up the little boy and tossed him into the mass of bodies like a rag doll. Then the Germans began filling in the grave with this little boy in it. I could not believe my eyes but I did believe my ears. I heard that little boy ask "Why are you putting sand in my eyes?"

We all then returned to our hiding place very depressed. This killing continued all throughout the day. It was very cold out. The water was even colder. We felt miserable. But we were still alive. We were stuck laying in there the entire day.

When it was dark out they stopped hunting for us and left. Despite the fact that the Germans were gone for now we were too afraid to leave. We stayed there all night long. We were just about physically and mentally frozen.

In the morning the Germans returned and the hunting and killing started all over again just as it had the day before. This was the method Germans performed round ups. It was like a day job for them. They worked during the day and then retire to food, drink and relaxation during the night. The Germans were not even afraid of people escaping during the nights. Because they knew that we knew the woods were just as if not more dangerous than the ghetto during a round up. They were such calculating murderers.

We were stuck laying there for three days. The fourth night my father and I could not stay here any longer. We smuck to a house in the ghetto and hid in the basement which contained a hiding place. We stayed there for another three or four days. The Germans were still raiding and rounding up the ghetto. I was depressed and sick of what was going on. I did not think I could take it anymore and wanted to get out this situation any way I could. So I thought to myself about my position.

A month ago I had run away from the woods to get away from the farmers. I thought staying in a ghetto would be safer than taking my chances going up to farmers and asking for shelter and help. I realized that the ghetto was obviously not any safer with all of the round ups. Then I thought that I would be better off back where I was in the woods. I did all right out there. I thought maybe I should go back out and take my chances. I decided to ask my father what he thought of this idea.

While my father and I were hiding from the Germans I said "I think I want to go into the woods. Would you want to go with me?"

He said "I do not think that is such a good idea. We are more likely to be killed in the woods than if we stay here and hide. I don't want to go." I was upset that my father declined my idea of going into the woods. I felt strongly that my idea was a good one and the right one. I had to make a decision between two choices. I could obey the wishes of the man who raised me, gave me so much love and my only living relative to stay there with him through what ever happens. Or I could follow my gut feeling, run off on my own and risk the fact that I might never see this man again. I made my difficult and seemingly shocking decision.

I went into the woods by myself that night to escape the Germans who were still killing. It was almost snowing. I ran and ran farther and farther away from the death ghetto searching for the thing in my mind that made me leave my father's side. That night I came across a house in the middle of the woods. I went up to the house and knocked on the door.

Through the door a tired scratchy voice answered. "Hello? Who is there?"

"I am very cold. I have no place to go and I have not eaten in days. I would just like a place to stay for the night and maybe a little bit of food."

"Oh, dear!" The door opened and behind it was a woman who was in my eyes eighty years old.

I said "Thank you so much."

She said "It is good that you came. I will give you food and hide you."

We went into the kitchen and she gave me some food and drink. While I was eating we talked. Mostly I told her all that I had been through. She told me a little about herself. There was not much to talk about on her part except she had been living in that house most of her life and she lived by herself. She probably let me into her house because she was so lonely. I did not mind keeping this lady company because it was nice to talk to somebody and I enjoyed and was thankful for the company also.

After I had finished my food the lady took me into a little bed room with a little bed and said "You can sleep here." This was a very nice place to sleep. I was so comfortable to be in a warm house in a bed. This was the best it had been since I had jumped off the train and even before the Germans had taken over my village. This was truly a luxury! I went to sleep in total comfort.

In the middle of the night she woke up and came into where I was sleeping and said "You have to get out, if the Germans catch you here they will kill the both of us!" Yesterday I felt good because finally somebody was going to keep me already. Anyplace, the basement, the hay or whatever I was happy just to have a safe place to put my head down and rest my body.

I was so depressed, I did not even try to debate her or beg to stay. I just said "O.K." and left.

On my way out she said "I am so sorry. But you understand don't you?"

Sorry was all well and good but I understood the truth that nobody wanted me. I was sad and angry all at the same time. Sad that all I had ever known or had was now gone. I was mad that all this had happened.

I went to another farmer for a few days. Then I ran to the first farmer who kept me for four days. He again allowed me to hide in his barn. I slept atop some hay during the nights. During the day I helped him around the barn. He fed me a generous half a pound of bread a day and some water. He kept me another few days and then I left again.

I decided to go to the market to catch up with a group of runaways which always stayed around that area. The escapees all knew about the underground. We knew who and what was where. This was a safe way for us to move around and receive important information. The underground knew and would be able to tell anyone the news about what was happening with the Germans, the ghettos and the Jewish people.

I snuck into the market. The place where I was going was the hidden basement under an abandoned shop. I had to be careful of being seen so I took an improvised route. I went behind some buildings and ran along them-until I came to a pipe running up the side of a building. I climbed it and hopped on to the roofs. I jumped from the top of one building to another and to another and on. After I had gotten to the right building I jumped off the roof into a large bin full of garbage. I popped my head out and looked around to make sure that no one had seen me. I jumped out of there and climbed into to an old abandoned shop through a broken window.

It was very dark and dusty. I crawled over and through the piles of debris from fallen beams and bricks. There was furniture, chairs, desks, shelves and left over supplies which had been disregarded, forgotten and left to rot. It had since all turned into worthless garbage. This was now the home to spiders, roaches, termites and rats. The was spiders laced the entire store with cob webs. Roaches were slinking up the walls. Termites were turning the wood into saw dust. The rats were scurrying over everything looking for what ever they could find to eat.

I made my way over to the entrance of the secret basement. It was a very small hole in a corner of the floor. I made it to the hole and now I had to get through it. I sat over the hole and put my legs through. My hands were at either side of my body. I lifted off of my seat and supported myself with my arms. I sucked my gut in and bent my elbows out. I squeezed through the tight opening like a mouse through the slight space between a door and a floor. I lowered myself so that my arms were folded in, level with the floor and my chest was even with the hole. I stayed there and rested. I thought of the position I was in and how ironically it was that I was now in the figure of a cross. I then got back to the task and swung my feet around searching for a ledge to perch my feet on. I eventually felt out a toe hole and used it for support. I prepared myself for the rest final step. I turned my head to the side and shot my arms straight into the air. I fell right through and landed on my feet. I felt like an Olympian after a successful performance.

Now I was in this cold, dark, wet, dank, smelly cave. The rodent problem was even worse down here. All I could hear was the squeaking of mice. I did not want to scare the people hiding in here so I announced my presence in Hebrew. I said "Hello! Hello! My name is Chaim Melcer. I am on the run and hiding. I am here to find out what is happening. Hello! Hello! Is anybody here?"

"Over here!" I heard. I followed the cave. I found a whole group of escapees all huddled together like a family of mice. "Hello!" They said.



"Hello!" I said. I went over and sat next to them. We started talking and sharing stories. I told them "I had been in the ghetto during the round up but had run away into the woods before they had finished."

They informed me "We have heard that the Germans had since left the ghetto. They had gone on to hunt and kill Jewish people in other villages."

I knew now that I had to go back to see if my father was still alive and well in the ghetto. I now was going to return to the ghetto to find my father. In all I ended up running around the woods for two weeks. It took me a day to return to the ghetto. Right away I could see the devastation committed the monsters known as Germans. I was overwhelmed by the horrible wake of a catastrophe that the Germans had left in their wake of terror. The ghetto was now relatively safe now that the wave of terror had crashed upon the ghetto and had by now dissipated.

Some of the buildings had been damaged and its rubble was now piled on the streets and underneath the holes they once stood tall in. There were fresh graves containing the casualties of the round up. It was terrible. The worst part of this round up was not what the Germans left behind but what they took. The ghetto which had been the home to over six thousand Jewish people when I had escaped was now the home to less than half. The Germans came and took over three thousand Jewish people to the crematorium of Sobibor to be killed.

Through this disorganization there was a sense of healing and organization prevailing over the entire ghetto. People were cleaning up the ghetto. People understood that what just happened was a time of death and that it was the past and over for now.

The people were not overcome by their feelings of grief to ignore what they needed to do to stay alive and survive the war. The people realized that now, the present, was the time to pick ourselves and the ghetto up. This was a time of life and growth. We were planning for the future. We needed to prepare for the next round up. Everyone knew this had not been the first or was going to be the last round up either probably. Everyone had a strong sense of will and desire to survive these times. This was the most important driving force behind our actions.

I walked through the round ups waste in search of my father. I was really worried. I felt very nervous about the fate of my father. I had a feeling that I might never see him again. I promised to myself and G-d that if my father was still alive and I found him that I would never leave him again. Never again!

I walked through the ghetto the very first time. But it was very different. I was trying to make my way through hell. I could not get help from anybody or at least get anyone's attention. I was trying to get the attention of people who had just a family

member murdered, captured or injured. I was not making any progress. I needed to ask these people if by any chance through all of this confusion and genocide they might remember the fate of one face in the crowd. But to me this was not another face in the crowd. This was my father and I had to find him. It was my mission.

I was looking around and decided to start looking for my father in the most likely place he would be. The quarters we stayed in. I went to this area and saw that the building was unscathed. I walked up to the room.

"Dad! Dad! Are you here? It's Chiam." I continued into the room.

"Chiam!" I heard a voice reply. He was there. It was my father!

We ran up to each other and we hugged.

"Dad I am so happy to see you!"

"Oh, son it is so good to see you!"

"Dad I love you so much!"

"Chiam, I can't believe it is you! I thought it was impossible to survive out in the woods. I thought that you would not return."

"Dad, how did you hide from those Germans?"

"I just sat in the basement and hid until they did not come back."

"Dad, we both survived. Your dream is coming true."

"Oh I hope it does!"

"Dad I am so sorry for leaving you."

"Son I am so sorry for not going with you."

"We must never leave each other again if we can help it."

"You are right. I promise."

"I promise." From that moment on I knew I would never leave my father and my father would never leave me.

*December of 1942,*

By this time of the year it was very cold out and I did not have the proper clothing. There was no way for me to get new clothes. There was no way for anyone to get new anything. There was hardly any way to feed ourselves. We could not go to the market. And even if we could go to the market we did not have anything to trade. There was no room in the ghetto to grow a garden and raise cattle as we had in the past. The ghetto was too full of people and buildings for that. There was hardly any grass. This was the way the Germans had planned the ghettos and their infinite control. That was the way things were. All that we had was on our backs. But if we were willing to take the chance

for what we needed, not just wanted, to survive we had to sneak out of the ghetto and into the market to steal some food and clothes.

Around the beginning of the war the Germans hid out in little spots around the woods near the towns and villages. They would hear from informants about escapees in the area and then they waited for the escapees and sprung on them. It was like a mouse trap. The escapees came to the villages for obscurity and a chance to acquire living goods. The Germans would realize this and then snap on their prey.

There was a doctor who lived not too far from the ghetto. As a matter of fact he and his family were from our village and knew of my family as any neighbors know each other. We never talked but we were neighbors the same. And I knew if this neighbor of mine had seen me out of the ghetto and in the woods sneaking into the market he would have surely turned me into the Germans. This was the way of life. Former neighbors and friends were now turning each other in, with no regard for past alliances, only because of differences in religion and belief.

I occasionally ran this gauntlet to hunt for some food or find new clothes. This was extremely dangerous and had severe consequences. The stakes were high in this fight for survival. If I did not sneak out for food I would have probably starved to death. If I did not sneak out for clothes I would have probably frozen to death. And if I did sneak out and was recognized I would be put to death. This was the ultimate price I risked to pay in order to survive. Fortunately I never had to cash in my chips.

*Christmas time 1942,*

It was now even colder and I had not eaten for two days. I was in the ghetto starving and freezing. There was nothing left in the ghetto. All of the food had been eaten and all of the rags were being worn. I needed to leave the ghetto to acquire necessary living materials such as bread, fresh water and clothes. So I left the ghetto to undertake this very rough task.

My search for food and clothing lead on a strange and ironic journey. I had walked through the woods for a couple of hours thinking of where I could get some food and clothing. I was about a half a mile away from the Bug River when I decided to go into the center of the town of Wlodawa to find some food and clothing.

There was a dichotomy about going into town. I would probably be able to find what I wanted. But there were also a lot of German soldiers patrolling this area and I knew what would happen to me if I were found. I took the risk and went into town.

While I was walking through town I came upon three boys who had been neighbors of mine. They were boys not much older than me who emigrated from Russia.

They were all sitting around a table. Their names were Stepan, Baris and Henryk. Stepan wanted to become a priest. So I figured he would be sympathetic towards a person in my position. I believed he would spare me some food since he is was man of G-D.

I walked up to the table upon which there was some bread and aimed my question at Stepan. "May I please have a piece of bread. I am starving. Please."

He picked up a loaf of bread in his hand and while holding it he looked at me and said "When I look at you as a human I feel sorry for you but when I look at you as a Jew I am happy that this has happened to you!"

We were neighbors. And I felt if I had gun I'd shoot him. I was thirteen years old by now and had to face these horrible desires. But I did not say that to him. I said "Hey listen Stepan, do you have a knife?"

He said "Yes, what do you need a knife for?"

I said to him "Let's see, you believe there's a G-d, I don't know what to believe any more. Let's forget what we believe and we'll believe what we know and can see with our own eyes. We'll cut my finger and we'll cut your finger. We will bleed the same color. We are the same inside." I tried to convince him in any way that I was the same as he was. I thought that if he realized we were the same he might find it in his heart to give me some food.

He said "Time to leave, if you are to live, and I hope he [G-D] takes you."

I started to leave. Then he yelled out at me "Hey Chiam, would you like some of my bread now?" I so desperately needed that bread. I was so hungry but I did not take it and I ran away.

In the beginning I was not used to living on the run. I starved a lot of the time. Some farmers helped but most didn't or wanted to kill me. They treated me like I was an animal, some pesky field mouse worthy of dying. Now that I had realized the overwhelming reality of the relationship between myself and the entire world I decided to live like the wind, never be seen, but to always be present. This philosophy and way of life was most effectively employed against the farmers. I stopped approaching them and began stealing potatoes and water from inside their barns. Living incognito was the only way to stay alive. After the first two months my survival techniques were ironed out and I was able to keep from starving.

The next night it was very cold as usual. There was snow on the ground and I was very hungry. I was running through the woods still looking for some food. I came across a house and snuck into the basement. It was very dark but I managed to feel my way through the room with my arms straight out so I would not run into anything. I happened to feel a blanket and when I pushed against it I felt some an object hidden behind the

blanket. I lifted the blanket and reached out and felt out two glass bottles. I picked them up and noticed that the contents seemed to be a liquid. It was so cold out I was surprised these bottles had not been frozen. I decided to investigate further and try to get a look at my find in some light. I thought if I could see what was in there I might be able to figure out what this liquid was.

There was a full moon in a very bright and clear sky. I held on to these bottles and climbed back out of the basement. I got outside and held the bottles between my face and the moon. I saw through these bottles a sort of translucent brownish liquid. I was still unable to tell what this mysterious liquid was. I needed to test this liquid in a way that I would surely know what it was. This method was not a safe practice but an effective one. To figure out what this was for once and for all I was going to taste it. I hoped and prayed that this was not going to be something poisonous. I did not want to lose it all in this way. But then I figured that a person would not stash a poison in their basement. So I went for it. I opened one of the bottles. I put the bottle to my mouth and tilted it back just a little. The liquid flowed into my mouth. I swished it around a little bit. The I swallowed and it slipped down my throat into my stomach. The taste was almost overwhelming. It was very strong. My whole mouth was warm and my whole insides felt like they were burning. My cheeks pulled back into my face. I coughed and felt as if I was breathing fire. I did not know what I had drunken.

But then to my relief I noticed this tasted somewhat familiar. I realized I had found a stash of someone's homemade whiskey. All things considered it tasted pretty good to me. I sat down and had a couple more sips. I felt very warm and comfortable.

After drinking my share I packed up both bottles and headed back home with my loot. On my way back I started to eat some snow but the strange thing was that I could not feel the snow on my face. I made it back to my hiding place early in the morning around five o' clock. When I burrowed into the hole I awoken my father and showed him what I had found. He was very surprised but not as enthusiastic as I was at the time. He suggested we wait until Sabbath. I could not wait until then. I drank some more. Not a long time after did I fall into a very deep sleep. I woke up the next day in the afternoon around three o' clock.

Things were good for once. It was a nice surprise finding this Chanukkah present for myself and my father. It reminded us of the old times when we would celebrate our holidays. This was one thing that we would have been doing now in our old home if none of this had happened. This find was like finding a little piece of mind and old life. This was a minor and well needed relief from all the horrible things I had to go through and overcome.

*January of 1943,*

I went back into the town market to trade some goods I had acquired in the past month. While walking through the market I noticed the other two men who had been with Stepan when I last saw them were coming straight towards me. I thought they were going to the Germans to have me killed. I was in the middle of the market. I did not have any place to run. I could not go or hide anywhere without causing a huge commotion which would have surely brought me to the attention of Germans just looking for an opportunity to kill an escapee. I was so scared. I thought this was it.

But I could see this was clearly not what was going to be the case. In fact it was the exact opposite. As the two boys approached they crossed themselves. They touched their head, stomach, and both sides of their chests. I said "What are you doing, I am not Jesus?"

They said "Don't you know what happened to Stepan, he got killed! The Russians sent him to pick up some books and the Germans threw a bomb where he was and he was killed. Nobody else got hurt, only him!"

When I heard this news I truly believed there was a G-d and that G-d punished him because of what he did to me. Those two boys were in awe and shock. They could not believe that their friend Stepan had died and now here I was standing in front of them. I guess they realized their vulnerability. They saw the greater truth that man did not ultimately decide who lived or died. G-d was the controller. They realized that it was not always the powerless who died and the powerful that always survived. They saw that one of their own had been killed and a small insignificant Jewish boy who everyone was after was still living. They had learned the ultimate power of G-d.

The boys were so soft I thought I might get something out of this whole thing. I asked them "As you can see G-d is out there somewhere looking over us. In the past you have done and said many wrong things. I think he would notice, appreciate and have mercy on you if you began righting the wrongs you have committed."

"You are right. What do you suggest?"

They were so weak I asked them a true test of their faith. "How about you talk a farmer into hiding me?"

"I don't know. I mean if the Germans found out about that sort of thing we would be killed."

I said "You would rather fear the wrath of the Germans over G-d." I tried to convince those simple boys to reconsider. They chose to forget what happened to their friend and worry about the consequences they would have to face from the Germans than

those of G-d. That shows how powerful the Germans were. They were so influential that it seemed like they had more power than G-d. They could make a G-d fearing person so scared that one totally disregard their faith in G-d for that in the Germans. They could make the price they would have to pay from G-d seem like nothing to fear and terror the Germans could bring upon people. The Germans were scarier than the creator himself. For this reason the boys were blinded by fear and did not learn the lesson. I said "OK" and walked away. I could not blame them. I realized and understood that they were afraid. They were feeling for a few moments something I and every other Jewish person had felt for the past two years.

*February of 1943,*

I was now living around Sobibor. There were a lot of Ukrainians in the area I was living. I spoke fluent Ukrainian by this time. I had been living there surviving amongst the people by blending in with the culture. I decided to go to a Ukrainian church. If I knew how to pray like them I felt that it would help me to disguise myself. I said to myself "Let me learn how they pray and maybe I'll figure them out." I snuck into the church. I sat way in the back, the last row of seats. Most of the people were in the front but there were a few in the back with me so I was not all by myself. The Priest had just started his sermon and in Ukrainian the first thing I heard him say was "Look for them, find them, catch them, and kill them." I realized he was talking about the Jews. Then after that chills went through my bones. I slowly stood up and in a hunched over posture retreated from the church.

After I heard that I lost all faith and hope for these people. The one person who was supposed to stand for what was right, the person who all go to for advice, the one who people look up to with admiration, the pillar of the community, the man closest to G-d was telling his people to do the work of the devil.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### MIDDLE OF LIFE IN THE WOODS

*March of 1943,*

My father and I were still in the ghetto. By this time we had grouped up with eight other people and were all living together in a single room. While living in the ghetto I traded and stole enough items to feed and support everyone in my group. I discovered a very successful method to find goods.

Throughout the war the Germans abducted many families and sent them away to the death camps. Once the Germans had done this they would raid the houses looking for all the money, jewelry, art and what ever other valuables they could find. This resulted in many empty houses. But the houses were not exactly empty. All of the common goods such as clothes, pots and pans were totally disregarded and left behind. These were exactly the things we needed in the ghettos.

I sneaked out of the ghetto and into these houses. I felt horrible for going into another person's house. But I knew that these people were never going to return. I could do nothing to help those people. What I could do was try to prevent any further deaths by helping the people I could help. In these houses I gathered whatever I could take to the market and trade for other things.

Sometimes a group of us all went to farms for supplies. One night a group of us ran to the farm of an older man who had two sons working with the Germans. We especially enjoyed taking from this man. We all ran up to a shack where he kept his supplies. The door was locked and breaking the door in would have made too much



noise. We thought of a different way to sneak into this shack. I climbed on top of the pathetic straw roof. I ripped out a hole just big enough for me to fit in. Then I slipped in, jumped to the bottom and opened the door from the inside. We found and took rye, wheat, flour, barley and beans. We always took whatever we could cook and eat. We also took some blankets. Then we left with our great find.

All the items we gathered we conserved and saved to make sure we had rations for times of need and desperation such as when we had bad luck unable to find food and bad weather during the Winter season. In order to have the best chance to survive life in the woods we had to think ahead and plan for the future. We had to make the most of situations which would benefit us in the future. Neglect for one opportunity could have meant starving or freezing to death.

I was always busy doing something. I found it very helpful to keep myself busy. Even though I was often overwhelmed by just trying to stay alive with necessary survival chores like finding food. But I was able to take up and learn hobbies that not only helped me pass the time but also make life better both mentally and monetarily. While I was sitting in the ghetto and not out hunting for items with nothing better to do I made baskets and sold them for extra money. I found this practice to be very relaxing and therapeutic.

*April of 1943, Friday,*

The day after Easter my father and I and about ten other people were all in our house. We were all scattered throughout doing chores and just keeping busy. Everything was pretty quiet.

Then all of a sudden we heard shooting. We looked outside. The Germans had surrounded the ghetto. Trucks and jeeps pulled up, parked and blocked off all means of movement in or out of the ghetto. The soldiers immediately filed out of the back of large transport trucks. The officers jumped out of their chauffeured jeeps. Once all the Germans had organized themselves they charged the ghetto in rows ten abreast with rifles in hand and screaming. They started shooting and beating people. Everyone immediately knew what was going on. The Germans were executing another round up. We all screamed warning that "The Germans are coming! It's a round up! Get out of the house! Run to the basement!"

Instantaneously everyone in the house stopped what they were doing and darted to the back door. We ran out to the back yard, quickly cornered the side of the house to the walkway for our escape to the basement. By the time we arrived there were a lot of other people already in the basement. Everyone was totally disorientated by the whole event and were unable to organize in an effective manner. We all jammed into this little

basement trying to get into the hiding place. We soon realized there was not enough room to evade the Germans. Fourteen people had already snuck into and claimed the hiding place that was now overfilled. I and nine other people only had room to hide in the regular part of the basement.

Once we were in the basement we heard the Germans kick down the door of our house and go through it. Then they progressed to the back yard and searched around that area. We knew it was only a matter of time before they would find us. Fifteen minutes later we heard a group of men coming down the walkway. We knew they were coming. We could not go anywhere. The hiding place was full. We were trapped like mice right here in this hole. They no sooner opened up the door to the basement and found us. We were caught. Immediately they pounced on us like a pack of wild dogs. They pulled us out of the basement we so desperately, yet unsuccessfully tried to hide in.

After we were all taken out they looked in for any more hiders. When they looked in all they saw was a "normal" empty basement. After all this the fourteen people were able to evade the Germans. They were safely hidden from the deadly sight of the Germans. There was no way the Germans would be able to catch on to the hiding place and find the people it concealed. That is how effective it was. If only it had been larger we all could have been able to evade the Germans.

Upon our capture we were encircled by German troops and an officer handed down a barrage of orders for us to obey. "Take off all your clothes!" We took off all of our clothes. This was a common practice of the Germans. They searched for any valuables that prisoners might have. We did not have very many. In this type of situation the Germans usually were only able to steal items which most people possessed such as wedding bands and gold teeth. They would not hesitate taking a ring from an old woman or a tooth out of a person's mouth. They were ruthless. They searched us looking to find any possible valuables before they completed their mission.

Then we were told to "Line up against the wall!" We lined up in a row across the front wall of the basement we had been hiding in. We were facing away from the basement towards the backyard. The Germans then formed a firing squad in front of us. A row of soldiers all armed with machine guns, spread as wide as our row, mirrored us from the open and opposite direction.

All of us were just standing there naked and quivering realizing that what all of the soldiers and people had said to us all these years was now going to happen. We were going to die, I was going to die. I imagined my father, if he were still alive by the grace of G-d, looking over my dead body. We were totally surrounded. There was a wall of armed Germans ahead of us, there was a wall to the right of us, there was a wall behind

us, there was a wall to the left of us. It looked as if there was no way to get out of this situation. Except I noticed there was a window that was in the wall of the house to the left of us in which I lived. This was going to be the only exit out of this death sentence. I had a little glimmer of hope. Then the officer screamed orders "Prepare to fire." The Germans soldiers raised their guns taking aim in our direction and at us. Then a second later "Fire." The Germans started shooting into us. Simultaneously I snapped, I made a dash for freedom! I ran away! I felt a burning sensation in my left ear and a wet warmth flowing down the side of my face on to my neck.

I jumped through the window into my house, ran through a door up a flight of stairs to the second floor and climbed into the attic which concealed another hiding place behind a double wall. Two Germans came in after me. One climbed through the same window I had and another ran in through the back door. I was already hiding by the time the Germans had barely made it into the house. Then I heard a single shot and then a German say "I shot the dog!" A German had found someone still in the house and without hesitation killed that person.

I crouched in-between the corner of the attic and the roof. I sat there on my back side with my knees tucked into my chest and my arms around my legs. Blood was pouring down the left side of my face. My ear filled with blood. Blood was pouring down all over my body.

From my sprint for life my heart was pounding like a steam train. My chest was expanding and contracting as fast as it could just to keep up with my heart. Beads of sweat poured out from every surface of my body.

I did not know exactly where I had been wounded but I knew about the area. I could tell because as the sweat dripped into my wound it burned like a hot iron. I did not know how badly I had been wounded. This aroused the worst presumptions. I thought I was bleeding to death.

Soon my entire body was covered in red. My face, my neck, my back, my torso, my arms, my legs. Then I realized that my perspiration mixed with the blood and spread the fluids to coat the entire surface of my body. With every inhalation my body would press together. As I exhaled my body would shrink and I would feel the sticky and coagulated blood and sweat stretch apart only to adhere my skin together again by the next breath. Throughout all this I had to compose myself and stay still making sure not to make a move or a sound and give my position away.

I heard everything they did. They charged up into the room I was hiding above, lifted up makeshift beds and kicked over boxes. I could tell by their footsteps where they were at each moment. After some time of searching I heard an officer call the soldiers

back. They did not do such a good job, thank G-d. This was unlike the very thorough practices of the Germans. They probably could have found me if they really wanted. They figured it was only a matter of time until they would catch me. They went to continue their raid throughout the rest of the houses. I guess they were willing to accept the fact that they lost one prisoner and had caught many more. They would not want to waste any further time on me. The soldiers all banged down the stairs with their boots. I could not believe that I had gotten away. As soon as that they were gone. I made it!

I had made my escape, but not without any injuries. I did not have the opportunity to pay attention to my wound before now. I was now able to assess how badly I had been wounded. I felt around the side of my face then I felt around my ear. It was extraordinarily sore. I moved my finger around the inside fold of my ear. My finger touched upon a raw area from which the blood was flowing. I noticed a piece of flesh was missing and it was the source of all the gushing blood. I realized I had been shot in the ear.

I thought of what had just happened outside and what I had just escaped from. I imagined everything in slow motion. The machine guns, the fire from the muzzles and the sound resonating from them. I thought of the firing of each round as it was spit out of the guns, cut through the air and ripped into my roommates. This lasted no more than ten seconds and was more than ample time to do such destruction. I thought of everyone mowed down just laying on the ground lifeless. Then it was all over. So many lives were taken in so short of a time. I knew I could have been there. I could have been shot to death right then and there. I could have been dead. This was a thought that crossed my mind very often. I shook and tremored in reaction to all of this. It seemed so unbelievable that a human life which takes nine months to be born and years and years to be nurtured and taught how to live can be ended at any time for any reason in less than seconds.

The Germans had since moved on to an area on the other side of my house. I was able to see them by looking through the boards of the roof. There was another group of people who had been taken out of their house. I noticed that there was a baby crying. I did not pay much attention to this, at least not right away. About that time one of the German officers heading this raid screamed out an order in the most attacking voice. I quivered at his words. Since I did not know German I did not know what he had said. But then I remembered the crying baby who was now crying even louder. I realized what the officer had said even before the German soldiers had reacted to his orders.

Three soldiers of the strongest, ox-looking soldiers immediately honed in on the mother and her little baby like a swarm of bees on a person who had just disturbed a bee hive. With indifference and the deadly swiftness of a hawk snatching up a field mouse

they ripped the baby out of its mother's arms. She started crying and pleading begging for her baby back. The men began to walk away. Now crying out even harder she ran after the men and grabbed on to the legs of the soldier who was holding her baby. She shook, pulled and tugged trying to stop him. There was nothing anyone could do. The other soldiers just kicked her away and slammed her in the head with the back end of a rifle. It was like the crack of an ax splitting wood. Her entire face was covered in blood. This did not phase her, she did not care, she only wanted safety for her baby. The Germans did not kill this woman as would have been expected. Rather they had an even sicker, more cruel plan. The officer motioned with a waving of his hands and a nod of his head. Two of the soldiers picked the mother up by the arms and restrained her. The other soldier brought and handed the baby to the officer. The officer reached out with both hands and took hold of the baby. He rested the baby against his chest and wrapped both arms around the baby. He then moved his right arm down and wrapped his large hand around the baby's feet. He then pulled away his grasp of the baby with his other arm. The baby fell backwards heels over head. The baby was left being held upside down by the feet in the hands of the officer dangling and facing head first into the ground. The officer then coiled his arm and swung the baby across his body. Then the officer uncoiled his arm and swung the baby back the other way. Without any hesitation, he then released his grasp on the baby's feet and threw the baby head first into a wall. The mother screamed out!

Then everything was silent and still. This was only for a moment. Then again everything was loud and hectic. The Germans then completed their job and carted off the mother and other people who were around this area and witnessed this event.

This was just one of many areas in the ghetto where this happened. Eventually all the Germans left this area and went on to others. I knew this because as I sat in my little corner I heard the all too familiar bursts of gunfire progress across the ghetto.

A few hours later night had fallen and it was dark out. It was dangerous to leave but if there was any time to leave the night was the optimum time. This was the only time I would dare leave my hiding place. I felt it was as safe as it was ever going to be to leave my hiding place and go outside. I cracked out of my shell of dried blood sweat and crawled out of the corner I was hiding in. I jumped down from the ceiling and crept down the stairs. I walked out of the back door and turned the corner of the house to the walkway I escaped from hours earlier to save my life. This area which had been filled with so much life not long ago was now a resting place to all of its casualties. I noticed right away the bodies of the people. There was now a row of corpses along the wall I had been lined up against. The bodies were slumped, bent and strewn over each other just as they had fallen into this tangled mass of human carnage. I looked at this desecration of human

life. I saw the bullet hole ridden bodies of these people. I saw the river of blood which flowed off the bodies like a stream down a mountain into a giant lakes of blood on the ground below. The concrete wall I had once been standing in front of was now splattered a dark red with dried blood.

I was still naked, only covered in a thin film. I picked up a rag from the ground and wiped off this coating the best I could. The next thing I did was search for my clothes. I found them still laying where I had taken them off. I quickly threw my clothes on and ran back into the house to where I was hiding.

Once I went back to my hiding place I was too afraid to leave. I believed at any moment the Germans could return and catch me. I did nothing except sit still, stay quiet and hide. I did not want to take any chances.

*Monday,*

That night I had been hold up in that building now for three days. I had not moved since the day of the raid when I retrieved my clothes. I could not take any more of this hiding, just sitting still, making no noise, and starving. I was feeling miserable. I decided I had to get out of my hiding place no matter the risk and look for some food.

It was totally dark in the house and therefore I could not see anything. I was searching for anything edible that may be out or hidden no matter how rotten I knew it would have been. I stirred through my house. I made my way down into the kitchen. I was walking cautiously in a crouched over position on my toes and constantly pawing out in a circular motion into the space ahead of me. I did not want to walk into anything and maybe hurt myself or make a noise. Mostly though I wanted to make sure I did not miss anything I could use. I found the cupboards which held some of the little food we had. I opened the cupboard doors and felt around the shelves. My hand hit something like a small metal box. It had some weight to it so I was sure something was in it. I realized it was the last tin left in the house. I grabbed it, pulled it down and opened the top. It was partially filled and I could not tell what it contained. I licked my finger, swirled it around in there and then tasted my finger. I sensed something with a very sweet taste. It was sugar. I started to eat the sugar which was very good nourishment for me. As I ate it dried my mouth out and burned my throat. I became intensely thirsty. I needed to find something to drink. I frantically flailed my arms all around the room trying to feel for some water. There were no sinks with running water so we used large buckets of water to clean food and other kitchen materials. I came across such a bucket of water. I knew that it had been sitting there stagnant since day of the round up. I could definitely tell from the nasty stench how old and dirty this water was. The smell of rotten potatoes emanated

from the bucket. It had probably been used to clean dirty potatoes a week before. I could pay no mind to this. I had nothing else to quench my thirst. I lifted the bucket to my mouth and drank. The water was at a disgusting room temperature. The taste was even worse than the smell. It was the most vial thing I could imagine. My stomach contracted and I thought I was going to throw up. I could not do that after all the sugar I had just eaten. I tried to ignore the taste by holding my nose but that was impossible. The taste was overpowering. All I could do was just imagine I was drinking fresh cool water and that was that. I felt sick to my stomach after drinking that water. I prayed I was going to be okay after drinking that bacteria infested water.

*Wednesday,*

I left the house and snuck across the ghetto. There was nobody in the ghetto that I could see. It was totally empty. On a "normal" day there would have been at least a thousand people moving around the ghetto. During the nights there were no lights in the houses. It was completely dark. People were either hiding, taken away or killed. Now the ghetto was like a deserted town. It had been totally devastated.

I ran over to the house of a family whom I was close with. It was empty. Nobody lived there any longer. The Germans had either killed or taken away this family along with almost every other. I went through the house and then into their basement. I was searching for any stored food. I was not finding any. The house was totally empty. I thought I was totally out of luck when a thought popped into my head.

I remembered that basically all of the farmers hid their savings in the floor of their basement. With this in my mind I went walking along the wooden floor until I stepped on a plank that felt as if there was nothing underneath it. I knew it must have been a hiding place. So I picked up the plank and put it aside. I saw one huge sack. I reached down grab it. When I picked it up I noticed it was very heavy. When I set this huge sack down it made a distinct clanging sound. I opened it up and saw around a hundred solid gold Ruble coins. Today's equivalent would have probably been something like fifty thousand dollars. I had uncovered a stash of money that I could not believe. I was so excited. A rush of energy ran through my body like nothing else. I thought to myself that this money could have fed a family for some years. This is the way people like myself were trained to measure worth. How much food could be bought? was the most important, necessary most often asked question! Food! Food! Food! More important than gold itself!

I tied up the sack of gold coins, stood up, picked it up and slumped it over my shoulder. It hit my back with such a force I was almost knocked over. I staggered out of

the house struggling with the weight of the gold. I could not carry this far so I decided to go to a close and safe place.

I brought the gold to a huge drain in the ghetto which I had used before as a hiding place during a raid. I crawled into the concrete-confines of this hiding place. I dropped the sack of gold off my back. When the sack crashed onto the pipe it made a loud clinking sound that reverberated throughout cavity. I then sat down right next to the sack of gold to think.

I thought realistically about what I could do with my new found wealth. I considered all the possibilities and consequences. Could I go into the market and buy everything I need? I would not have to worry about food but I would still have to worry about being caught by the Germans. I wanted to be safe from the Germans. So I wondered if I could go to a farmer and give him this money to hide me?

I knew from experience the answers to these questions. Other people had tried to do the same things. I knew I could not let anyone know I had gold. If I tried to spend the money people would have killed me on site and taken what I had on me or assumed correctly that I had more and would have followed me to my stash and take it all. What would stop someone from just killing me and taking my money? Nothing! People had been killed for no more than money and a whole lot less of it. The overwhelming propensity of greed and the desire to take what someone else had because one wanted to have it was reason enough to kill someone.

Could I hide the gold and come back to it at another time? Would another time ever come for me to retrieve and be able to spend the money? Would I even live? These questions brought me to the sobering facts. I felt so strongly that the Germans or anybody else was going to find me and kill me. I believed that I would surely be dead soon. I was so sure that I was going to be dead the next day. I decided that the money was of no use to me any way. I did not even want or attempt to hide the gold. I would either be killed for possessing it or just be killed. Would I want anyone else to take this money? Better the money go to hell than the Germans. So I dumped all the gold out in the drain and ran back to my hiding place empty handed.

*Friday,*

I went on to search the basement. I snuck very carefully out the back door, to the walkway and into the basement. I looked around and saw none of the supplies that had been there before. I then had a feeling to look in the hiding place which I was unable to enter the week before during the raid.



I crawled in through the boards and false wall. In there I saw about eight people just sitting against the wall. There had been fourteen originally so I figured the six who were gone probably went out hunting for food and decided to go out into the woods. They were either hiding out there hunting for food or had been caught by the Germans and killed. I walked up to each of the people here to see if I knew anyone.

I had not seen my father since the day of the round up. I did not know what happened to him. I did not know if my father had managed to escape the Germans or something else. I was hoping that one of these people was going to be my father. My heart was beating with excitement. I walked down the line of people. One after another. I was half way down the line. I saw a man with his legs stretched out, back slouched over and head leaning down. I crouched down beside this man. I tilted his head up and looked into his face. It was my father! I found my father, still alive! He must have made it into the hiding place before I had. In the confusion there was no way for either us to have known either was there.

"Dad!" I said.

My father only groaned in response. He looked so weak and emaciated. I realized shockingly he had eaten nothing since the round-up. My father was in need of sustenance. Fortunately I had managed to scrounge up and eat some food. It enabled me the little strength I had to be able to take care of my father and myself. I stayed in the hiding place with my father comforting him the best I could.

*Sunday,*

This was our ninth night of isolation in that building. I assessed our position in our environment. We were still here for many reasons. One reason was that we were in shock from the round up. We were afraid to leave the ghetto and risk being caught by the Germans. Another reason was there was no other place to go. But this was a reason to leave. The Germans had declared a policy that all the ghettos were to be totally exterminated. The Germans did not want any prisoners alive in the ghettos. Therefore we could no longer stay in the ghettos. It was only a matter of time until the Germans returned to kill all of us who they had missed. Our only other option was to move into the woods. With this in mind I decided it was time to leave this hell hole.

I said to my father "Dad, we must go. The Germans could come back at any time. We will have a better chance of surviving in the woods."

He said "I do not want to go anywhere!" And then declared to my surprise "I want to die here!"

I was not going to let this happen if I could do anything about it. I remembered the promise that my father and I made to each other that we would not leave the other under any circumstances. And I was not about to break that promise. I said "C'mon Dad there is another ghetto with other Jews in the direction of the woods." This was a lie. I was going to do what ever I could to give him some motivation and will to get to the woods and live. We had to get out of the ghetto and into the woods if we wanted any chance to survive. That was exactly what we were going to do.

I said "I will be right back." I left the hiding place, peeked outside and checked one last time for Germans. They were not. I came back and said to my father "We are leaving right now! The both of us together!"

I had to pick up carry and pull my father because he did not know how or was unable to walk because he hadn't eaten in nine days. I lifted my father and started out of the basement I hoped we would never return to. I made it up the basement stairs. I kicked the door open. The skies were pouring out rain. There was lightening and thunder. I saw the massacred people as the lightening lit up the sky. They were unmoved since the day they had fallen. I could not see them too long because the light flash was so quick. But it was very bright and burned the sight of those people into my mind.

We went out in the direction of the woods. It was very strenuous to not only have to carry my own weak, tired and starving body but to carry another was almost impossible. This was my father though and I saw him as another part of my body and I could not leave a part of my own body. I was going to do whatever it took for my father and I to arrive into safety.

We eventually made it out of the ghetto and into the woods. I knew this would be the last time we would ever have to be in and run away from a ghetto. I decided to head out in the direction of our old village Sobibor. I was not sure if we were going to make it at this rate but if we were going to have any chance at surviving this was the necessary risk. I almost lost all hope as my father had. But I decided to fight, fight as hard and as long as I could, not backing down and giving the Germans the satisfaction of my defeat whether it be mental or physical. I walked as long and far as I could. It took me eight hours to go four miles supporting my father. I could go no further. I did not have any energy left in me after this.

It became apparent that we were not going to make it all the way to our village that night. My father and I picked an area heavily covered in brush. I sat my father up against a tree. I then dug a hole for us to hide and sleep in during the night. When I finished the hole I laid my father down in the hole and I covered the hiding place with some branches to disguise it from any possible threat.

I then went out hunting for some desperately needed food. On my search I came across a farm. I walked up to the house and noticed the smell of something that was now not too familiar. It was the scent of cooked food. I crawled around the back of the house and found a large pot. I looked in and noticed it contained the disregarded remains of some soup. There were a few potatoes, a few pieces of meat and also a bit of soup which no more than covered the bottom of the pot. This was a great find and what made it even better and wonderful was that it was still warm. Food was hard enough to find but when it was fresh, cooked and warm it was even rarer. This was a special treat of which I was very appreciative. I sat down beside the pot. I gathered up the potatoes and put them into a pouch I always carried with me for such situations. Then I lifted the pot to my mouth and swallowed this wonderful nectar. I placed the pot down and digested my meal for a moment. I then returned to my father to share with him this delectable find.

I crawled back into the hole and sat next to my father. I noticed he had not moved from the position I had set him down in. I figured I could cheer my father up with the finds of tonight.

"Dad, you won't believe it. I went out and found a fresh pot of soup." As I was telling him I brought up the bag I was carrying and uncovered the potatoes. "Look Dad, actual cooked potatoes. We are so lucky."

"I don't want to eat them!"

I could not believe my ears! For once we had actual good food and my father did not want to eat it. "What was the problem?" I asked my father totally confused.

"I am afraid they might not have been cooked Kosher."

I thought to myself. 'Oh, my goodness. What a time to be religious. When you are about to starve to death. This is unbelievable.' My father's refusal to eat this "maybe" non-Kosher and therefore prohibited food was shocking to me. But I understood my father's concerns. He was a very strict religious man who was conscious of everything action. Even at the moment of death my father my father persisted to stay true to his beliefs and was willing to sacrifice his life for them.

I also understood another bit of religious law that I assumed he must have forgotten. I was more than willing to remind him of it. So I said "Dad, in the Jewish religion if a death can be prevented by breaking a rule such as this, it is a rule in itself to break that rule in order to prevent a death in any capacity what so ever. Therefore one is allowed to eat anything, Kosher or non-Kosher, what ever is necessary to survive." I eventually convinced him. When I did he ate one potato then two, three and four. It took him nearly two hours to eat those potatoes. I didn't let him eat any more. I knew that if he over ate after eating nothing for so long that he could over eat and die. But I had that

under control. I had a little bit more to eat myself. We were all able to ingest some well needed nourishment. We really needed this food. We sat back digested our meal. We went to sleep satisfied that night under the stars with our bellies full.

We woke up rejuvenated the next day in the bright morning sun with our bodies well rested. We then began to complete the rest of our journey to the village. Along our way we were walking through a village named Taraschuky across large field. My father and I noticed a man who was watching over his cattle while they were grazing. This man also noticed us. We were not too far apart, just close enough to be able to make out each other's likeness. My father and I stared at this man and he at us. My father seemed as if he was some what familiar with the vague figure of this man and vice-versa. Each decided to clarify for certain the true identity of the other and they both walked towards each other. I followed my father cautiously not being really sure of the situation. When they were close enough to decipher each other's face they recognized each other. It turned out that they were old acquaintances. We met in the middle of the field and offered the standard greetings.

Then the man asked "Where are you going?"

My father said "We are going back to Sobibor."

He replied "Don't go no place, stay close to our village and no one will find you. We don't know, we don't see, we don't hear! And if our farmers have any food they will give you some!" We felt as if these people were heaven sent! They were brave and generous people. So we decided to take this man's advice and decided to stay around the neighborhood of this village.

Later that same day during the twilight of the night my father and I were walking through the woods. It was past the light of day and not yet the dark of night. My father and I, through the tall, dark and still pillars of the trees and against the orange sky, spotted the dark silhouette of a man who was moving about the woods. He then stopped and noticed us. We both realized that if we were "normal people" we would be walking along the road. Only escapees would be aberrating through the middle of the woods at this time of the day like fugitive animals. We started to walk towards each other. Within fifty feet my father and this man realized that they knew each other.

It turned out this man was indeed a fellow escapee. He was a fisher from the old village who sold his goods in the market. My father sometimes bought fish from him. We met up and started talking.

"How long have you been in this area?" He asked.

"We just arrived. We met a farmer and he said we should stay in this village."

"He is right I guess. This place is not as bad as others."

"How long have you been in this area?"

"Some time now."

"Are you alone?" I asked.

"No, I live with my wife and my daughter."

"Where do you stay?"

"We stay on a farm in a loft where the farmer stores and piles his hay. It is not too far from here."

"We are looking for a place to stay. Do you have any suggestions?"

"Well, is it just the two of you together?"

"Yes" We said.

Then simultaneously the same idea popped into our heads and we said "Let's see how we can exist." Back then we did not live we existed. "O.K. Let's do that." We said. We thought it was a good idea for us to group together.

He said "Great, you can come and live with my family and me. There is room for all of us. Let's go there now." We went back to his place which we were now going to share. When we arrived we all introduced ourselves. By the day's end my father and I were extremely tired and we took shelter that night protected from the rain.

*May of 1943,*

By now we all had been living on the run long enough to learn the best possible ways to survive. Life in the woods was never easy. We were always struggling for the next crumb of bread to eat and a safe place to hide. Surviving consisted essentially of two things; finding food and evading the Germans. This criteria for living was a science consisting of many formulas. We learned facts and gained experience through trial and error. We utilized instinct where we had no experience. We always changed our tactics and methods of operation, adjusting and adapting to our environment and situation. We figured out and predicted the tactics the Germans would use to come after us and we used that to evade them. We culminated all these to help us solve the solution to living. If we lived by these rules we were able to take calculated risks. Nothing was ever certain. All we were able to do was improve our chances at living.

In the beginning of the war the Germans hunted for us all hours of the day. But eventually ceased during the night and it became relatively safe to move around under the cover of darkness. We were better off during the night than the day. During the day time the Germans were out in full force and we had to watch out for ourselves. One false sound, one false move in the wrong place at wrong time, the lurking Germans would have definitely caught us.

During the night we collected our food. Most of the farmers around us knew we were hiding in the woods and left out and shared their food. From their barns we found bread, beans, barley and flour. From the fields we picked our potatoes. Sometimes we actually harvested milk from the cows in the barns.

Rarely we were unable to acquire the food we needed from the farmers who shared with us. In this case we had to steal what we needed from those farmers who would not share. They were dangerous people because they would have had us caught or killed if they knew of our presence. In this case we tried to make it seem as if we had not taken anything or been there at all.

Basically we took whatever was available from the farmers. Mostly we consumed bread, potatoes and water and not much of anything else. After a night of foraging for sustenance we retreated to our shelter in the hay loft or holes in the ground underneath bushes to disguise ourselves. During the day if we felt our environment was safe enough we made a fire and cooked what we had found. During Passover we actually made matzos right in the middle of the woods instead of just eating bread.

*June of 1943,*

We had lived together now for two months. Things were going great. We were able to find enough food and were not hindered by any Germans. We could never be in the same place for too long of a time. We always had to stay on the run. One day Zaelig went into the village. When he returned he told us about an article he had read in the newspapers. He reported that "Thousands of Germans are going to stand one next to the other and comb through the woods to hunt for all of the escaped Jews on the run." After hearing this new information we decided we could not stay around this area in the woods because of the threat the Germans posed. We had to find another place to go.

Zaelig decided to move his family to an area where he used to fish. It was a large farm with a lot of land and three big lakes. He was positive he would be able to acquire food and evade the Germans. This area sounded ideal. He was going to be able to provide the two necessary elements to survive; security and food. It seemed like the family was going to be well off.

My father and I did not want to head in that direction. We planned to move closer to a safe hide-out in the huge rye fields which covered many acres of Poland. During these summer months there was nothing in these fields at all except rye. We would be able to sneak to farms to find our food. The Germans expected that not even people undeserving of life would dare hide in such a barren place. There was no way they would

hunt for us in this area. Their ignorance towards our will for survival would work to our benefit.

From that point we wished each other "Good luck!" and said "Good bye!" and then went our separate ways. The family went off to the farm and my father and I began our trek to the rye.

It took about a day to reach the center of the giant fields. When we arrived we dug ourselves a place to stay. The weather was very warm and humid. After being in the fields for only two days the skies opened up and started to rain. It poured and it poured. We were drenched. Eventually our hole filled up from the rain water and became a large pool of mud. We sat on top of the edge of what used to be our hiding place.

It was horrible. We were stuck in a virtually flooded swamp. It was so wet and warm. There was nothing we could do. We could not stay dry. We could not go anywhere to get out of the rain. We were unable make any type of structure to protect ourselves from the storms because we had no materials. In a last ditch attempt to dry off we took off our soaked clothes. But by this time our skin had been so saturated that it was severely swollen and blistered. The layers of our skin peeled off along with our clothes. After being stuck in the water so long it was like being soaked in acid. Our skin melted away with the water. The rain did not stop. As the days went on the condition of our skin became progressively worse. The atmosphere continued to pour for a second day, a third day and a fourth day. Finally the rain stopped after the fifth straight day.

The flood water began to recede and the land started to dry and so had our skin. We were left covered from head to toe in thick black mud and rye particles. This mud and rye mixture actually worked as an adhesive keeping what little skin we had in tact and amazingly sped the drying process. Our skin had been terribly damaged from these extreme weather conditions. The wounds themselves did not hurt so severely. However it was extremely painful when we moved and the sore skin rubbed together. We could not move without fear of tearing weak flesh or opening up a wound and bleeding. Our skin was now regenerating. After about a week our skin reached a point that we were able to function almost normally.

I noticed something very interesting throughout this whole process. Our skin and the earth went through similar cycles. There was a correlation in the condition of our skin and the earth. In the beginning both were soaked and swollen from the rains. Then the excess water went away. What was left behind was a loose and sloppy resemblance to what was present before the rain. Then began the drying process of absorption and evaporation of the water. A chapped period followed from the massive expansion during

the rains and then shrinkage from the drying. Eventually after much healing both returned its original state.

After healing I was out hunting for food again. Hunger is not something that can be put off or ignored. It is a chronic necessity which always must be tended to and satisfied. It never waits for a convenient time. One night around two o'clock in the morning I was walking along a moon lit road back from a village, where I found some food, to my hide out in the rye. I was about a half of a mile away from the village: noticed a group of three people walking along the same road towards me and the village. They were about two hundred feet away. I assumed it had to be some escapees but I was not sure. I jumped in some bushes by the side of the road. I waited there hiding until they walked up to the part of the road beside me. I watched these people. It appeared to be a man, a woman and a child. They looked somewhat familiar from what I could see. I then thought to myself that this might be the family my father and I stayed with for those months and split up from two weeks earlier. But this did not make any sense. They should have been miles from here on a farm. I went with my gut instinct and decided to get these people's attention and find out if they were this family or whom ever. Everyone on the run had secret sounds to communicate with other people in a non-conspicuous form rather than screaming out words. I had my own whistle and the family that I assumed this was knew it. If it was really them I would see a response, if not it would be ignored. I whistled a first time and they did not respond. I whistled a second time and they turned around. I whistled a third time to make sure they could hear it clearly. They whistled back their call. It was them! I jumped out of the bushes and we met up.

I said to Zaelig "I thought I would never see you again. What happened to the place where you were going?"

He told me about his experiences. "Germans began patrolling that area heavily and it got to the point that this area was very dangerous to inhabit. Other escapees who lived in the area near us were almost killed. The Germans were too prevalent in that area. It was too dangerous to live there. So we returned looking for a safer area."

"It is a good thing you did! Come on back with me. My father and I have a spot in the rye fields."

"Great! This is amazing that we were able to find each other again. What luck!"

"Yes it is." I said. "Back together like old times." They returned with me that night to our hole which my father was in. We were all happy to see each other again. We were now a group of five again. Zaelig, my father and I started searching together for food in the villages like we had before we split up.



Even around here the Germans were constantly looking for us. They went through the villages on a regular basis and associated with the farmers. Both developed a functional fondness for each other. The farmers prepared meals and drinks for the Germans. In return the Germans would pay the farmers sixteen kilos of sugar for information on catching Jews. This was the worth of a Jewish person to the Germans. We were aware of this relationship between the Germans and these farmers.

One night Zaelig went out to a farmer's garden to gather some vegetables. He did not return that night. We were not worried. We thought that he had just decided to spend the night where he was and would be back the next day. He did not return the next day. We were now worried. We started to believe that something bad had happened to him. But we still were not sure and had some hope. The day after that he did not return. We assumed definitely he had been caught and killed. It had been three days since he left us. Later that night we heard some rustling in the rye around us. We thought it was some Germans. We did not make a move or a sound. I could tell by the pattern steps that it was only one person. The noise became louder and louder. The person was coming closer and closer. The person stopped. A whistle cut through the silent air. It was the whistle of Zaelig. He was here! He had come back! He was still alive! I whistled back to him so that he would be able to hone in on the location of my sound and find our hole in the dark ground. He made his way back to the hole.

"Thank G-d you're back. We were so worried!"

"Thank you! I am fine!"

We asked him "What had happened that kept you away for so long?"

"I went to that farm and I saw some German soldiers around there. I stayed around to see what was going on. Due to, what must have definitely been, help from certain farmers the Germans eventually realized that we were in this general area but not exactly where. They went up to this farmer and were inquiring about our past actions and if he had any information about us. He told them all that he could about us. He was more than happy and willing to help the Germans catch and kill the Jewish people. The Germans decided to wait by his farm. They were there, hiding, ready to ambush anyone who came by searching for food. The plan was not working. The Germans waited and waited and there for three days. They did not see or catch anyone. So they eventually left. And that is when I decided to come back. We all went to sleep that night thankful that we were all together again.

*July of 1943,*

A month after reuniting and living in the rye we moved back into the woods. We found a new place near an old farmer whose property we stayed around. We started to take food from this farmer about twice a week. The farmer knew about us taking his food. He even knew when we were going to come and left out some food for us. He helped a lot.

One day while I was in the village I came across a Russian named Wasil who was also hiding from the Germans. He and I started talking and he told me his story. The day his old life ended and his new life started was a day to be expected in the military.

"I was a Major in the Russian Army. My troops and I were in our barracks waiting for the next mission. Out of no where German troops attacked the barracks. My men and I were caught off guard and unable to prepare ourselves for battle. Because of this we did not really have a fighting chance at all. We were barely able to engage in a fight against the opposing forces. It was an extremely bloody struggle on my side. In the end my entire force had been slaughtered. When the massacre ceased the Germans had killed almost everyone. A few had managed to run away but I was still alive in the barracks with my murdered soldiers.

The Germans then began to clean up the barracks. They started to pick up the bodies of the dead soldiers and throw them outside in the back of the barracks. I realized and did what I had to do to continue my fight for survival and escape alive. I played dead. I could not move. If I did I would have been killed. Two soldiers picked me up, carried me outside and threw me in the back of the barracks in the pile of my murdered soldiers. I fooled the soldiers. The Germans left all of the dead bodies in a pile to rot.

That night they stayed in the barracks and rejoiced their pillaging by helping themselves to food, drink and rest. I however stayed hidden in the bloody mass of my lifeless men all night long. I was kept up by the celebrating soldiers waiting for my opportunity to escape. Finally, in the early morning, when I was sure all the soldiers were still asleep I knew it was time. I crawled out from the bottom of the pile and peaked out. There was nobody around. I crawled the rest of the way out and ran away.

I ran to the first farmer's house I saw. I knocked on the door and a woman answered. I asked her for some help. I told her what had just happened to me. She let me in. I was greeted with open arms. I was surprised about that. The woman took me into her kitchen and prepared some food for me. We sat down at the table and started talking. I told her more of my situation. Then she told me her's. It turned out this farmer was a widower who had lost her husband several years before. Eventually she went on to ask me 'Would you like to stay with me at the farm?'

I immediately said "Yes!" This was a very convenient relationship for us. It suited both our needs to couple together. The widower received help around the farm and I was assured safety. We both also had found deeply needed companionship. We have been together since that day. Eventually I heard about the escapees in the area and went out in search of them. This is how I came to be here and meet you."

"That is an incredible story." I said after hearing all that. I believed it was a miracle that these two had found each other in their own separate times of need.

He came with me stayed with our group for a few days and then returned to his new home and life. He continued to visit us whenever we came to the village.

*August of 1943,*

I had gone off by myself, as I usually would, to a village to find some food for the group. I hunted for a few days and managed to accomplish my goal. I started to make my way back. Night fell as I was walking through a large hay field which had recently been harvested. The farmer gathered the hay into large mounds which were scattered across the field. I realized I was not going to make it back to the group that day. I decided to sleep in one of the large masses of hay. I jumped atop a pile of hay, shaped a little bed, laid down and went to sleep.

While I was sleeping I had a dream. I imagined my mother and she was in a place with me. She said to me "The field is burning, run away!" I woke up, it was around three in the morning and I did as she had urged. I ran from where I was sleeping to the edge of the woods. After I did all this I wanted to find out if I was crazy or not. I waited to watch and see what if anything was going to happen. I waited all morning then into the afternoon. Amazingly, around one in the afternoon some Germans came searching through the field. If I had stayed there, I would have surely been killed. I made it back safely to my group after that close call.

*August of 1943,*

Later that month the group of us went into a village and we met two escapees. Their names were Hershel and Morihay. I knew them, they were my neighbors from back in Sobibor. They were victims of the same round up of the villages back in October of 1942. They had managed to escape the trains as my father and I had. The fate of their family was the same as ours. Their wives and children had all been killed. They told us about the dangers they had encountered since that day years ago in October after jumping off the train.

"We both just escaped from the death camp Adampur. We had gone there on our own. It seems ironic for a person to voluntarily give himself up for imprisonment. But this had become the only alternative to running around in the woods. There was no other place to go. We had been chased out of the ghettos we were staying in and we did not want to live in the woods. So we were forced to work there as slaves for the Germans. At least we were allowed to stay there until two days ago. That is when the Germans started to exterminate all of the prisoners in the entire camp. We and some others were able to run out of the camp and away from the murderers. The rest of the camp of between 500 to 600 Jewish people were all executed."

"My father and I were also chased out of our ghetto." I then told them of what we went through to survive the raid on the ghetto.

Hershel then told me about his experience in his ghetto before he went to Adampur. "I was in the ghetto one day when all of a sudden a group of Ukrainian citizens with guns invaded the ghetto. We were surprised that these people were not German soldiers. But it turned out that when the Germans decided to clear out all the ghettos there were not enough of them to do the job so they hired some Ukrainians to invade and clear ghettos. Two Ukrainians ran up to my house. One came inside and the other stayed outside. I ran out of my house behind the one Ukrainian and the other kicked me down to the ground. He stood on top of me with his foot pointing the rifle down at me. While I was laying on the ground under this man I looked right at him. I saw that he had looked away from me up at his partner in the house. I immediately ripped the rifle out of his hand, knocked him over and ran away with the gun into the woods.

That Ukrainian called out to his friend 'Come out here! I need help! My rifle has just been stolen!' The man ran out of the house to help his partner. The two Ukrainians chased after me and the one who still had his rifle was firing at me. Eventually I threw down the rifle and kept on running. After that they ceased their chase. Regaining that rifle was extremely important. The Germans lent out those rifles to the Ukrainians. If those soldiers returned missing a rifle the Germans would have killed them. So ironically, while these Ukrainians were chasing me they were running in 'our' shoes for once in their lives. This was poetic justice and the only type we could afford."

"Hey, would you two like to join our group?" I asked.

"Yes, we would." They said.

"Great!" We all went back to our hide-out in the woods. We were now a group of seven.

*September of 1943,*

One night we went to pick up some food from the farmer we were staying around. When we went up to his barn he came out and said "The Germans are around this area hunting for you."

"Thank you very much!" We said. We then ran away from the barn and back to the asylum of our hiding place. He saved our lives.

*November of 1943,*

One day I was off in the farmer's yard laying in some hay and I noticed a little hole in the field. I suddenly remembered what I had heard one day when I was in the village. There were some people hiding around this area. I wondered if this was the place where those people or anybody else might be hiding here on the farmer's property. I decided to take a closer look. When I approached the hole I thought maybe somebody had lived in there but died because of the awful rotten smell coming out of this hole. This did not hinder my investigation. I ventured in farther anyway. It was not a big hole so I had to crawl in. The smell of waste and decay almost overcame me. I made a whistling sound and asked in Hebrew "Is anybody in here?" I did not hear anything, so I asked again. "Is anybody here?"

I heard an answer! The people muttered weakly "Yes. Hello. We are over here. We are a group of two, a husband and a wife." I crawled in the rest of the way until I met them.

"My name is Chaim Melcer."

"Chaim... Melcer..." The man said slowly.

"Yes. Chaim Melcer from Sobibor."

"Our last name is Melcer also. I am Lazer Melcer and my wife is Ester Melcer."

We talked some more. We figured out through our lineage that we were third cousins. I gave them some bread. I told them about my experiences, my family, my father, and my group in the woods. They told me about their experiences. The most unforgettable thing I heard was when the mother said "We had two children who had been killed by the Germans."

I stayed with them for a few days. I asked "Would you like to come back with me and stay with my group out in the woods?"

"No, thank you. We don't want to leave."

"Okay, then I will come back in a couple of days with some food and check up on you both. All right?"

"Yes." Thank you!"

"All right. See you soon."

"Good bye, Chaim."

"Good bye." I returned back to my group in the woods.

*March of 1944,*

I was in the farmer's barn one day. He noticed me and came out to meet me. He said. "Hello. How are you doing?"

"I am getting by. And you?"

"Fine I guess. Hey, I need your help."

"Sure," I said. "Anything."

"There is a family, a husband and a wife, who are hiding on my property."

He did not know I knew of them. "Yes," I said. "I know of them. I found them one day while I was in your hay field. They are my cousins."

"Really!"

"Yes."

"They have lived here for quite some time now. There have never been any problems. But I have become aware that the woman is now pregnant. This is a very serious matter. I have thought long and hard about this and what the family could and should do now that they are having a baby. She can not possibly give birth to a baby in the hole they are living in. That is no environment to have a baby. So I thought about the baby being raised in my house. But my wife died several years earlier. My neighbors would become suspicious. I am worried that might bring a deadly amount of attention to us all. I have come to the conclusion that the woods is the best place to have and raise the baby. You live out in the woods with a group of other people. You know how to survive out there. The baby would have the best chance of surviving out there, better than any other place. Could you please take the man and woman out to the woods to your group and help them raise the baby? It is for all our own good especially the baby's that they do not stay in the hole and go to the woods."

"I think you are right. I will do this! I will bring the family out to join my group in the woods."

"Thank you very much!"

"Thank you too for being so sympathetic towards us. I know what you are risking for us."

"It seems like the right thing to do."

"Before I go I would like to give you something to hold for me in case I survive all this and ever come back."

"What is it?"

I pulled out my mother's ear rings and wedding band. "Here, these the last things I have of my mother."

"I will save these for you."

"Thank you. Now I will go back to the family and help them to the woods."

"Thank you. I will wait for the day you return for your mother's jewelry. Good luck!"

"Good bye!" I said.

I went back to the hole in which the family was staying. I said "Hello." as I entered. "This is Chaim."

"Hello, Chaim." They said.

I sat next to them. I said "I just met with the farmer. You know what a nice man he is. He is always looking out for the best of you and a lot of other people. That is why I take what he says genuinely. He is aware of your pregnancy. He and I had a big discussion about your new family issues. He explained to me the possibilities and consequences of all the options for your family and soon to be baby. He came to the conclusion that it would be deadly to raise a baby in this hole, or in his house. He concluded that the best place to raise a baby is in the woods. And after talking to him I agree."

Lazer said. "Hold on Chaim. We do not want to go anywhere! Don't you think it is a little more than convenient for him to get us to leave by saying he does not want us to have the baby here and to go into the woods and have the baby. We are happy right here!"

"Maybe so. But he takes totally unnecessary risks for us. That should be proof enough of his good intentions. He is only looking out for you and your baby's best interest."

Ester said. "But Chaim we don't want to leave!"

"I understand, but it is for the best of us all. For the best of your baby. The woods is probably the best place to raise your baby. There is some food out there, room to move around and distance from the Germans. I am in a group of now seven people. We have been living in the woods for a long time. We know how to live in the woods. I believe we would be more than able to offer the both of you and your baby the best possible environment for a family as possible. I do not say this as a messenger of the farmer but as one of your only living relatives."

Lazer said. "Well Chaim, I guess you are right. Maybe the woods is a better place to live and raise a baby. We will do this. We will go."

"Good. You are making the right decision." I said.

We all sat together talking about not much. Just little things to keep our minds off our journey to the woods. We waited until around eleven o'clock at night.

I said, "I think now it is time to leave and begin the three mile voyage to the woods. It is late enough that there don't seem to be any Germans around and also early enough that we will have enough time to take our time to complete the voyage under the cover of darkness. Are you ready to leave?"

"We are ready as we will ever be." They were laying down and went to raise their bodies. They were unable. It seemed as if they were stuck to the ground unable to release themselves from it. "Chaim, we can not get up." They said to their and my own shock.

I did not think much of this and thought they needed a little help to stand up. I said, "Here, let me help you up." I stood up in front of Lazer and offered him a hand up. He could hardly even raise his arm. So I bent down and with both my hands grabbed both of his. I leaned back and pulled but it was like tugging on dead weight. He did not respond. His chest arched forward solely from my pulling. He was so weak in fact that he could not even support the weight of his head and it just flopped back behind him. I set his body back against the hole as it had been before. Then I tried to help Ester but she was no different. They were like a part of the ground.

They did not have enough muscle to produce enough strength to move. This was a result of them not moving their bodies for eight months. They had laid in the hole for so long their bodies had become severely atrophied. Being unable to lift an arm, move or crawl I knew that both the husband and the wife were too weak to walk on their own to the woods. This journey was not going to be so easy.

I then realized I needed to move this couple via my own accords to save them. From that point I devised and implemented an effective system to do the job. The first thing I did was carry Lazer and then Ester out of the hole. Then I picked up Lazer by the arms and drag him five feet along the ground and set him down. Then I went back and repeated the process with Ester. I continued this until all three of us reached the woods. We were up all night just struggling to live another day. This three mile trip took me the whole night until eight in the morning when we finally made it back to my group and hide out in the woods. We were now a group of nine.

They were extremely sick from the exertion and stress from the voyage. As soon as we arrived the group fed them some food. For the first week their health was touch and go. They barely survived. But then their condition improved. They gained weight and started crawling around a little. After two weeks or so Lazer started to walk around a little back and forth, back and forth. Ester took a little longer to gain strength. I then began to take Lazer with me to find food during the nights. But in order to do this I had



to tie a rope to the waists of both of us and lead him. He had the sickness which totally prevented him the slightest vision during the night. Even though the sun is down and it is dark during the night time it is not totally dark. There is radiant light from the moon and atmosphere which offers a minuscule but enough light to move around during the night. This night blindness was due to a lack of nutrition and vitamins. I didn't know what it was called, but he didn't see anything at night. The sun went down and he was virtually blindfolded. After consuming a satisfactory amount of food this problem went away. After about a month Lazer and Ester had recovered to a point similar to that of any member of our group.

*Later in March of 1944,*

I did odd jobs every once in a while for food, clothes or anything else. This day in particular it was very cold and snowing flurries that did not stick to the ground. I was with another man who was my partner. We were carrying potatoes. He had a sack of twenty kilos and I had one of ten kilos. We were hauling our goods to a village to sell them.

I was struggling with a serious problem. It was not primarily the usual starvation or freezing weather but the pants I was wearing. They were two years old. I had cut and sewed them myself out of a Russian soldier's over coat. This was a very thick and rough material but very strong. Due to the excessive use of these pants over their life time resulted in many holes and tears. I needed to maintain these pants for as long as I could and not just let them fall apart. The wear and tear from life's work were all repaired with other pieces of cloth sewed over the destroyed areas. The pants had by now turned into basically a collage of patches.

I barely able to walk due the excruciating and arresting pain inflicted from these pants. They were rubbing up against my legs. Every step I took the pain and damage worsened. From the first motion of stepping as one of my legs moved forward the material wrapped around, tightened and dug into it. Then, as the other leg would begin to come forward completing the step the same thing would happen to that leg, as the material around the first leg then loosened up as the leg straightened out and released its grasp pulling away and removing layers of skin on that leg. This repeated process wore off enough skin on my legs to make them tender, raw and bloody. Today I could not stand it anymore. I had to stop walking.

I told the man whom I was working with "I can no longer walk any more. My legs are too sore. The skin has been worn off of them from my pants."

"Then I will carry you." He said. He ended up carrying me, my goods and his own the rest of the way to the village. When we arrived at the place to drop off our goods he set me down.

I said, "Thank you!" That was all I could do for him.

Gravely fed up with all this I thought to myself "Let me get this over with." I walked over to a frozen lake by the edge of the village. "Let me just jump in the frozen ice and get it over with. I have time to die. This is something I can afford. If I can not have my freedom I will settle for this. I do not need the excruciating pain of life as a prisoner."

I had set my mind right then and there on ending my pain once and for all. I then had the urge to do something which did not make sense. I did not feel it would be right to jump in with my pants on. In preparation I took my pants off and laid them on the bank. As I walked over to the frozen water's edge naked I realized something. I could walk. I could walk much easier without the pants. It still hurt but it was not nearly as unbearable as before. I thought if I just gave myself a chance to heal and not wear those pants for a while I might just be able to survive.

I was so excited and relieved. I knew I did not truly want to die that day. But I was so close. I had been that close before but it was closer than I had ever willingly expected to be. I wanted to live now. I went back to my pants and picked them up. I walked back to the village with my pants over my shoulder. I did not really care. It was this humiliation or the severe pain. I walked over to a fire and laid my pants out to dry. When they were dry I put them back on and it was not as bad.

From then on I alternated wearing my pants. When I walked to the village I wore my pants but on the way back from the village I would take them off and walk home without them. One way I was warm but my legs chafed and on the other I healed and froze. Not wearing my pants was very cold but that was far less of a struggle than walking in sheer agony or not walking at all. This proved to be very effective.

*April of 1944,*

Each member of our group survived that Winter. We barely survived but survive we did. That was all we could do. Things were looking better. We were all a little healthier than we had been in the past.

We continued on our battle of survival for ourselves and especially now the pregnant woman in our group who was close to giving birth. We were most preoccupied with the mother. The mother was very big. I used to go during the nights to a barn and bring her a half a gallon of milk from the cows and some potatoes from the fields. She

would drink the milk, eat potatoes and concentrate on staying healthy for her baby the rest of the day. Even if we were starving which we were she was given food or whatever we could manage before us. No matter how much food we gave her and how hard we tried all in all I felt she didn't eat that much, not enough at least.

*Beginning of May 1944,*

The woman went into labor. She laid on her back for hours and hours crying in pain. There was another woman in our group who was a nurse. All throughout this time of need she cared for the woman. This woman even knew how to deliver a baby. I thought for once I did not have to worry about something. When it came time for the delivery the nurse was shaking and unable to control herself. I ended up delivering the baby. It was a beautiful baby boy. We continued to care for the new mother and baby. During the day we all hid and the mother took care of the baby. At night we hunted and took care of the baby and let the mother rest. It was all right.

CHAPTER 6  
END OF LIFE IN THE WOODS

*July of 1944,*

It was a Saturday morning. The weather was wonderful. We were covered in clear blue skies and the bright beautiful sun. We came across a large swamp and on our stomachs to the middle of it. The swamp was about a mile wide and three long. Ahead of us there was a lake and off to each side was high ground. These were the only obstacles we had to deal with in this area.

By this time in the war the Ukrainians had joined forces with the Germans and were fighting together against the Russians. We were literally right in the middle of the fighting. The Germans and Ukrainians were to the west and the Russians were to the east. They were shooting from both sides across the swamp at each other. The war was fought right over our heads.

One of the women strayed from the group. She eventually caught up with us with her whole body shaking. She said to us "I had gotten so close to the German and was able to listen in on a conversation they were having. I heard one of the Germans say 'Nobody's here already.'" We did not believe her we thought she was dreaming. I was true we just barely evaded the Germans. We learned how close we were to the enemy and impending death only until after we were out of danger and survived. I was all shaken now!

We thought it would be safer to move away from the Germans and Ukrainians towards the Russians. But that was not what we heard. Earlier we came across some farmers and their disturbing reports. They told us that "The Russians were already here and we did not want to meet up with them because they also killed Jews." We decided to risk this chance and we crawled east to the side of the Russians. Well as we found out their statement was partly true. As in most battles some fighters live, some are killed and others are captured and become prisoners of war. This was precisely the case in the confusion of who was fighting for who and doing what. Germans forced the Russian soldiers who they had caught to fight on their side under the threat of death. They were the Russians who killed Jews.

We made it to the other side of the swamp. We were not going to sit in these swamps ignorant of our surroundings. One of us had to go and find out what the heck was going on. Eventually it was decided I was the man. I was both excited and nervous about what I was going to do. I had done tasks like this throughout the time I had been in the woods so I was relatively confident.

Shoeless and dressed like a cow herder I went on my mission. I brought with me only the bag I always carried. I used it to hold bread or any food I might find or take along my way in order to bring back with me some of what I had for others. I crawled on my stomach to the edge of the swamp. I was now on the front line of the Russians.

I could not believe all of this was going on. First the Germans were in possession of this land now the Russians. Things were rapidly changing now a days. I knew a man from earlier in my journeys who lived near by the river. I started looking for him. Just around this moment and had walked no more than a few hundred feet I heard a man's voice yell "Stop where are you going?"

I turned around and said "I'm looking for my cows." I was afraid he might have been a Ukrainian so I did not tell him the truth that I was a Jewish escapee.

"I have not seen any." He replied.

"I am so hungry. I haven't eaten anything for such a long while." I told him and then asked "Do you have any food you could possibly give me?"

"Oh, sure!" He said and then he walked me to a one of the structures in the field. It was a mess hall. We sat down together at a table and I told him a story explaining my presence. "I work for a farmer from a village..." Gather some food on my spoon, put it in my mouth, chew, swallow, talk while I put some more food on my spoon... I repeated this cycle as fast and efficiently as possible. He didn't even listen to what I was saying but I did not mind because it was not even the truth. He was giving me food and that was what really mattered most. I was grateful that he was giving me something to eat. I could not

complain. In fact I was very content just sitting, eating and maybe finding out some information from this man. I kept rambling on as I shoved mouthfuls of food into my mouth. I then got to the part in my story where I said "I came from a village where there used to be three Jews. I used to work for them watching their cows. Are there any Jews in the Army here?" I wanted to see if there was anyone who I might be able to feel safe with talking the truth.

He said "The Major is Jewish!"

But I still didn't believe him. I was not going to be convinced so easily. I acquired and adapted through experience from living on the run a healthy and almost paranoid suspicion of everything. I did not trust anyone. This was a good quality. It kept me vigilant and prevented me from being tricked into deadly situations. In many situations I was saved by this trait.

I shortly began to conclude my discussion and meal with this man. I said "Thank you, and if it is possible I would like to talk with the Major." Despite my suspicions about the validity of this man it was the only option I had. I was curious and wanted to talk with the Major. I wanted to find out if he was Jewish after all and even more so, if I could acquire some help for my group.

He said "Sure! The Major is out in the battle field. You can't miss him."

I left the kitchen to locate the Major. I went right out to the front line of the fighting. I saw and walked over to the man in charge and realized he was the Major. When I arrived in his immediate presence I saluted. He saluted back as if I were a high ranking soldier in his own Army. I said "Hello."

"Can I help you with something young man?" He replied.

"Yes" and I continued to talk to him. He was very receptive and more than willing to hear all that I had to say. I told him "I work for a farmer..." The same story I told the other man. It took me five minutes to tell my story.

After I finished he began speaking to me. We talked and we talked. I could not tell for sure whether he was Jewish or not. So finally I asked him a question I felt would clearly resolve all my doubts "Can you speak Hebrew?"

He replied "I can understand Hebrew but I can not talk it." I thought maybe it was true that the Russians killed Jews. I did not believe that he was Jewish. I was suspicious because I could not understand that someone could be Jewish and not speak Hebrew. I believed that if he was Jewish he had to speak Hebrew. I was very disappointed but I had to know for sure. I continued talking to him trying to find some clue to tell me of his true background. Finally, after ten minutes, through his talk and his mannerisms I realized that in fact he was Jewish!

So now reassured of his faith I told him "You know what I want to tell you? I'm not the farmer's boy, I am the Jew!"

He fainted! This man who had seen it all, murders, rapes and pillages had fainted from the words of a small little Jewish boy who was being hunted like an animal by the Germans, me Chaim!

When he came to and stood up he told me what was going on. "We are defeating the Germans. You no longer have to worry about them. It is all being taken care of right now. That is what we are here for!"

That moment I felt as if it was 'Highway to Heaven!' My heart started pounding, a rush of excitement ran through my veins and my head was filled with the most soaring sensations. "We are free! We are free! We are free!" I shouted and danced! My emotions were running wild. I had not felt this ecstatic and relieved in so many years I had forgotten how many it had been.

Now I had to go and inform my group. I ran to the swamp and crawled back to my group. Once I arrived I said "Everyone come around. I have the most wonderful news." They all came over. I exclaimed "We are free! We are free!"

"This is the truth?" They questioned. They could not believe me.

I told them "It is true. I met up with a Jewish Major of the Russian Army. He told me 'We are defeating the Germans!'" As I spoke the battle waged on. I then noticed the Russians performing a maneuver around the swamp in an upside down "U" figure from the east up to the north and then around the west effectively attempting to surround the Germans. "Look" I said as I pointed out the Russians and their tactics to my group. "There they are!" I realized the possible dangers. I suggested "We should get out of here now!" We then crawled south out through the opening and then west again to the Russian side.

We escaped the swamp and then ran to the Army base. By the time we arrived the Russians had prepared loaves of bread and water for us which we truly enjoyed. We all rejoiced together for this day, the day we had all been waiting for. Finally it was all over. All the running around, all the starving, all the freezing and all the death.

While we were eating and celebrating we realized that someone was missing from the group. It was Lazer, my cousin and father of the new baby boy. We did not know what happened to him. We went back into the woods to search for him. But all our efforts were fruitless. We were unable to find him.

That day my father and I began our journey back to our old village of Sobibor. On our way through a village my father and I met Wasil.

"Wasil, we are free!" I yelled.

"Yes, I know. We beat the Germans!"

"This is such a great day!" My father said.

"Yes indeed. It has been a long time coming." Wasil said.

"What are you up to Wasil?" I asked.

"I'm out experiencing my new freedom."

"Us too."

"What are you guys up to?" Wasil asked.

"We are going back home."

"Hey, can I come with you guys?"

"Yeah, you can come and live with us for as long as you want."

"All right."

"What about your girl friend? Won't she be missing you?"

"You are very thoughtful. Before I left today I told her 'I am going out and am not really sure what I am going to do or when I will return. So please don't be worried. I will be fine!'"

"Let's go!" My father said and we were on our way.



## CHAPTER 7 LIFE DURING LIBERATION

Two days later we arrived in our old village of Sobibor, the place where our family was run out of so many years ago. The village itself appeared relatively the same from before the war. From outward appearances the only thing I could notice was different was some of the Jewish people's houses had been destroyed. Otherwise it appeared to be the same. But it was not the same. Nothing was ever going to be the way it had been before. On deeper inspection we realized that a lot was different since the war. We sadly learned that we, my father and I, were the only Jewish people from our village who had survived. It would never feel like home again without the rest of our family. We were so depressed but we could not let this fester our progress. We had lived through so much. If we were going to continue surviving we knew we had to get on with our lives. Most importantly, we knew that is what our family would have wanted us to do so that is what we were going to do.

The house my family lived in before the invasion of the Germans had been one of those houses destroyed. But it was my Aunt's house where, after being relocated by the Germans, our family had last lived until we were all finally driven out of the village by everyone. This house we rightly considered to be and was our family's house and we were going to move back into it.

All three of us approached this house. As we did we noticed a Polish family had moved into it. They most definitely figured that my whole family was gone. So they as it

turned out they took it upon their own accords to help themselves to our family's house. It was hard to comprehend another family living in our family's house just as we would be if none of this ever happened. But now we were going to reclaim and live in our house again. We were going to try our best to make things return to the way they had been before the war. This meant reclaiming our possessions.

We walked up to the front door and I rapped on it. The door opened. For some reason the whole family had come to answer the door. The alien inhabitants looked us and saw three strangers. Yet my father and I were not total strangers because I noticed they squinted their eyes and barely recognized us. And when they did they turned pale white as if they had seen a ghost. They could not believe we survived. They thought we had come back from heaven or in their case, hell. They could not believe their eyes and just stared at us with surprise and awe. How could they have survived? I imagined they asked themselves. This disbelief soon turned into reality for the family. They realized that we still legally owned the house and the land.

Well, my father and I did not exactly claim the house. My father, Wasil and I simply moved in with them. There were two rooms. That family stayed in one and we stayed in the other. It was so ironic sharing what was my house with another family. They of course were not very happy with us living in our house again with them. But there was really nothing else they or we could do.

I then went up to my neighbors who had been given my cows by the Germans. I claimed and took back my cows. There was also a garden from which we took our vegetables. We made home made food. We ate beef, potatoes, bread, butter and milk.

Now we had a roof over our heads. Food was no problem. Things were not great but they were not that bad either. We did not look for luxury.

*Two weeks later,*

This one particular day my father had gone into town and Wasil and I were walking through the village. While on our walk we noticed a funeral procession. It had come from the church in town and was making its way through all the villages to Sobibor where the person who died had lived and was to be buried. There were two cows pulling a coffin. A Priest was walking behind this and ahead of a large group of about 200 mourners.

Everybody was crying. I was not crying. I could not cry. I did not know why I was not able to cry. Maybe it was the fact that I had been forced to become totally numb to the world in order to survive that I had lost the ability to cry. Even though I went

through all that I had because of people like these I still did feel bad that someone had died.

I immediately recognized the Priest. He was the one who I saw when I snuck into the church in February of 1943. I recalled what I heard him dictate during his sermon to his parish as if it happened only yesterday. I told Wasi what he had instructed his people to do. Then I suggested to Wasi "Let's go, I want to talk to the Priest."

He replied "OK, I will do whatever you want, if you want to kill him I will kill him for you. Whatever you want to do." He could do it too. But I did not want to kill him. Wasi then walked up to the Priest and the funeral procession and stopped it. I approached the Priest.

I asked the Priest "Why are you all crying? What's the problem here?"

"There is a little girl who has died." He replied.

I said "One little girl has died and you all are crying? You are all praying and walking with a cross? You are praying to G-d? How long ago was it that you said 'Find them, and catch them, and kill them?'" He was shaken!

I wanted to prove something to those people and teach them a lesson. This was my turn to give my own sermon. However I was not going to promote death and destruction as the Priest had done to his people. I was going to teach them humanely, maturely and intelligently that what they had done and were still doing to the Jewish people was wrong. This was a tactic totally ignored and renounced by all the conspirators during and now after the war. I was talking with all my mind, all the years of death, destruction, hiding, starving and running were now pouring out. I had the chance to say all that I ever wanted to and never could without fearing for my life.

Now I had safety and encouragement. These were things I never had while I was in the woods. Wasi enabled me the ability to have so much reassurance and confidence. I was so relieved. I was so proud to be with someone who could protect and take care of me.

I turned to the people of the village and demanded "How long ago was it that my neighbor's kid could have gone to the crematorium? How long ago was it that you were applauding when a group 350 Jewish people, including my little sister, were driven out from this village? How is it that you chased my little sister, my innocent little sister who never did anything to anyone, out from the village and you applauded? That was not so long ago! What could have made you change your minds so quickly and absolutely?"

They were left shaken!

These seemingly violent and cruel people were rendered powerless, motionless and lifeless by my words. They could not do anything now. I declared to those people with all

might and pride that "Before the war I was a Jew! During the war I was a Jew! Now, after the war I am still a Jew! And I am going to continue living my life as a proud Jew! I am proud to be what G-d has made me! I am proud to say that there is a G-d who has let me live to see this very great day! And I want you to know through all of these years in the woods being chased, starved, and tortured that you have not broken me! I will fight, fight as hard and as long as I can and will not be kept down any longer!" I then brought to their attention the fact "You can see that if I wanted ten of you or twenty of you killed I could do so. And if I did I wouldn't be punished. I would not want to do that. I would not do that! I am not a killer! I am a Jew!"

My point had definitely been made. I had no more to say. There was no need to say anymore. I turned and said to Wasił "I've done and said all that I needed and wanted. Let's go."

He stood in the background and did not say a word the entire time I was speaking. He had his time to fight against the enemies and he knew that this was my time. Wasił applauded me for what I had done. He said "You did good!" and slapped me on the back. Then he said "That priest was worth being shot." That's what he said! Ironically, I felt he was as shocked, stunned and surprised as the people who I was talking to.

When I went home that day I told my father about what had happened. His reaction was saying "I am not too happy about this. I think that what you did was too dangerous. I wish you had not done that. Don't do anything like that again."

I appeased his feelings and said "O.K. You are right."

I could understand his worrying. However he did not understand the intensity of the situation and the energy that flowed through my body that day. He was not there. This entire incident was reported in a Russian newspaper. I should have saved it but I did not think of it at the time.

*August of 1944,*

Life in our old village was depressing. The Polish were cruel to us Jewish people. They always said "What good are they? We don't need them here! We don't want them here!"

What had we done to these people? Nothing! The Germans were the ones who came into their land and caused such destruction. Were they blaming us for this? Surely they could not have been because we were the ones who had lost the most. They took out their anger and frustrations on the Jewish people. The Polish were murderers even when Nazis had been stopped.

After six weeks of living in Sobibor we could not take any more of the abuse. We decided to leave Sobibor. All three of us discussed where we should go. My father believed that we would fit in better and be less assuming in a larger atmosphere such as a town. He decided and said "We should go to the town of Wlodava."

Wasil said "I agree. That sounds like a good idea. I think I am going to go back to my girl friend. We will probably go back to Russia with and maybe get married."

I said "I am sure your girl friend misses you. That sounds like a good idea."

The next day we carried out our plans.

When my father and I arrived in town we found Zaelig and moved in with him and his family. We tried to lay low and not get ourselves into any compromising situations. We went into the markets and traded whatever we could to survive. We bought and sold goods. We dealt pots and pans, flatware and clothes. Everything was worth something back then. For food one went into the shops such as the butchery and bought chickens and the bakery and bought pastries. The acquisition of food was rather simplistic with a wide range of choices. This was a pretty decent and unassuming living just as we desired. Security food and shelter was not a problem anymore as it had been in the woods now that we were in the town.

*Two weeks later,*

One day just walking around town I saw Lazer, the man who had been lost in the swamp the day we were freed. I ran up to him and said "Hey Lazer, What's up? How are you?"

He said, "Hello Chaim. I am fine. Thank You. And you?"

I said "I am fine but tell me what the heck happened to you? I mean that day we went back into the woods looking for you. But obviously we never did."

"Let me tell you. It is an incredible story."

"I'll bet!"

"Well, as I was crawling across the swamp I lagged behind. The Russians closed in on the area around me. But that was not all. As they surrounded the area about thirty Germans snuck in around me. The Russians captured all of us during the maneuver. I told the Russians that I was Jewish but they did not believe me. They thought I was a German impostor who had changed his clothes in an attempt to evade them. They did not release me. I then showed them that I was circumcized and explained that only Jewish people had this procedure. But they did not understand at all. I was put and held in a Russian prison with the Germans soldiers with whom I was caught. Finally, a Jewish

Russian officer came by and I told him that I was Jewish and showed him I was circumcised. He understood. I was immediately freed after four weeks."

*July of 1945,*

I moved to Szczecin, Poland. It is only six miles from Germany. There were a group of apartments that had been freed by the Russians. I moved into one of them with some other Jewish people. I was always living with other people. We continued on our normal practice of living.

*December of 1945,*

Although Poland had been freed from the physical control and reigning presence of Germany; however, it had not been freed from the mental control and extremely intense grasp of the anti-Semitic fervor of Germany.

Even after the war Poland was not a healthy or even safe environment for Jewish people to inhabit. There was much animosity expressed and acted out both verbally and physically by the Polish towards the Jewish people. The survivors were consequently haunted by this land in which they had been and were still being treated so horribly and had such terrible experiences and memories. Therefore of the few Jewish survivors, most desired to leave their native Poland. Yet they could not leave legally. If they stayed they would be tortured and if they tried to leave they would be persecuted. This caused a serious dilemma.

Consequently there was an underworld around town which consisted of all the "undesirables," Jewish people, who survived the war. These people did not feel comfortable living in their society so they kept to themselves until they came into their own groups where they were accepted and understood.

One day in town a group of us "undesirables" were discussing this problem. Many people including myself were concerned about this problem. There was one man in particular who shared as deep a concern as I. We wanted to help all these people accomplish their dreams to leave. We decided to do something. We became partners in a plan to deal with this problem.

The man was twenty years my senior. Our appearances and roles were strikingly opposite. I was a young man who was not very tall, was thin and not too strong. He was an older man who was tall, husky and strong as a bull. I was the brain of the operation and he was the brawn. We were an effective team.

We began organizing the escape of Jewish people out of Poland. This was not a safe practice or a minor offense. Smuggling people was a very severe crime and if we were caught doing this we would be sentenced to the death by the German government.

In order for the people's departure, voyage and arrival to be as safe and successful as possible there needed to be orderly organization of many elements such as the escapees themselves, trucks, and opposing officials all working together. This job could only be accomplished successfully through the twisted practices of the Border Patrol's dishonor towards their employers, the law and loyalty to us, the lawbreakers.

After much planning and plotting we were able to acquire two large transporting trucks. We also bribed the Polish Border Patrol to let us smuggle through the border truckloads of refugees. For the final touch we put the word out to the group of "undesirables" that we were going to start smuggling people out of the country. It spread by word of mouth to all interested people.

Pretty soon it was widely known amongst all these people that an operation was being run that snuck people across the border. People who wanted to escape would go into town and get into touch with the band of survivors in the underworld who lived in the area and heard about this operation.

There were many people interested. We helped Jewish survivors who were citizens of Poland and also Jewish Russian and Polish officers who had been fighting during the war. When these people expressed an interest in escaping we would be relayed the message. We then got in touch with these people and told them of our operation.

We arranged groups of over two hundred people. During the night these escapees met us in a secluded secret, predetermined area and all boarded into the large trucks. We then drove the trucks full of people to Germany. It was approximately forty miles from Poland to Berlin. But there was an obstacle between us and Germany. There were Polish Border Patrol whose explicit orders were to not let anything go into or out of the country, especially trucks filled with Jewish war refugees. This did not surprise or worry me because this was a common formality in the liberation process. They did not have much pride in themselves or their country. We would simply just pay them off. The standard fee for freedom was usually fifty dollars a truck.

Once past the Border Patrol we drove into the middle of Berlin. The people then exited the trucks in the new country. We then returned back to Poland for the next voyage across the border with new escapees. There was a great demand for Jewish fighters in Israel so that is where a lot of the officers went. The refugees found eventual freedom in Israel and also America.

*February of 1947,*

This night started out just like every other of the unusual voyages across the border. Nothing was out of the ordinary except for this entire practice. My partner and I were transporting two truckloads of people. I was driving a truck filled with women and children and my partner followed in a truck filled with men. We reached the edge of Poland and were stopped by the Polish Border Patrol.

So when the guards came up to the truck I said "Here is your money," and offered one hundred dollars to them for the two trucks.

Strangely enough they did not reach for or accept the money. I was surprised. This had never happened before. "This is not necessary." They said. "Tonight is different!"

"What are you serious? What do you mean."

"We are going to take you in tonight. Get out of the truck!"

My partner and I exited the vehicles we were driving. I asked them "What is the meaning of this?"

"There have been a lot of trucks getting through here lately."

"No, really I wonder what could be the cause of this. Not any lazy, irresponsible, and bribed border guards such as yourselves!" I of course said this to myself. I wondered if they had miraculously gained some pride and a sense of responsibility in their job and country.

They went on to explain to what I could have assumed. "The government is very upset by this and they have offered a reward for capturing such incidents of law breakers."

It was clear they planned on making an example of us. I could not let that happen. That meant the death penalty for all of us. This had to be prevented. I saw that my partner was very nervous and panicking. I was probably as scared as him but I could not and did not show it. I had to be tough for all the people whose lives were at stake. I was not going to let all of our lives be ended by some government politics. I was going to do whatever it took to have as many people survive as possible.

I started pleading with the guards. I talked to them for such a long time trying to say what ever was necessary to get as many people free as possible. I finally brought to the attention of the guards that "You will get the same reward from one truck as you will two. Let the truck with the women and the children go and I will give you one-hundred dollars. Plus you will have the reward and respect for stopping this one truck." Old habits die hard. I knew how greedy they had been in the past.

Maybe and probably some of this would carry over into tonight. I was hoping and praying. This was probably my only chance.



"O.K." They said. "We will let that truck go but there is no way that the second truck will go. The other truck with all the people in it and you will have to come with us."

I knew it. They were so weak. These people's integrity was just as weak as I thought it was. This was such proof. I had just compromised their previously unquestioningly moral desire to do the right thing or just to get a reward which now they were still going to get. This was the hardest step. I had partially broken them. I thought for some reason if I could break them partially I could do so totally and completely. I accomplished one step out of two. I felt I was well on my way at getting what I wanted. I wanted all of us to get over those mountains safely. That was my goal and I was going to do that!

But first I had to ensure the safety of the passengers who were allowed to escape so I said to my partner "All right, you heard the guard. Take off!"

He said "Are you sure? The guards are really serious about taking you in."

In order to appease his worries I said "I understand that. Do not worry about me or the people in my truck. It is your responsibility to take care of those people in your truck. You have been given permission to go. Now do so, it would be foolish for you to stay here and argue about this right here and now!"

"Fine." He stated. "Good luck and G-d bless you Chaim!"

"Thank you! Really, don't worry. I will see you over on the other side of the mountain. I promise!" I was not sure if this was going to happen or not. I said it mostly so that he would be calm and able to think clearly to save the lives of those women and children.

My partner ran back to his truck and went through the border and over a mountain into Germany. That went off without a hitch and just as smooth as all the other nights of transporting people. I could not imagine why things had to go any differently today. There had to be something I could think of to do to get the rest of us out of this situation and on to the high road to freedom. I sat in the snow and thought to myself. It was now time to concentrate on my truck load of people and their successful crossing.

After five minutes I stood up and said to the guards "You will let us go too. And I will give you fifty or one-hundred dollars when I return the next time."

The guards said emphatically "No!" They seemed incorrigible and immune to money like they had just spontaneously contracted some allergy to what they had taken so gladly for so long. They wanted the respect for doing their job honestly.

I could understand this desire and I used it against them. I said "In that case when you turn us in I will inform your Commandantur that you guys let one truck go, the truck with the a whole lot of gold in it that we were smuggling."

"You will never be believed. No one would believe a Jew over us!"

"Do you want to take that risk? I will show them the tracks left behind from the truck you just let pass!"

They stared at me like statues. They were frozen in disbelief that I just ruined their great plans. I could not believe myself either that I actually blackmailed these guards back. Ha! It worked! I knew I had gotten them. They had actually gotten themselves. They had fallen into a trap created by their own greed.

They could not shoot all of us. That would have almost been impossible and it would have brought too much attention to them. The attention to that area would have noticed those same tracks leading off into the mountains. They did not want to face their punishment and be killed. They were only interested in their own welfare and the best for themselves.

So with already knowing the answer to my question I asked in an innocent yet sneering manner "May I go now?"

They turned their heads down and in a mumbled frustrated voice said "Get the hell out of here!"

I got back into the truck and drove off into the night just as I had planned.

My partner and I went on to conquer this game a few more times. I did keep my word and pay those men the money I had promised them. That night turned out to be one of the last times we ever drove people across the border. Shortly after this incident this task became more and more difficult and the risk too great for myself and the people who wanted escape across the border. It became too unsafe to do this anymore. The chance of failure far out weighed the chance for success. After doing this for more than a year we realized that now was a good time to stop.

*May of 1947,*

In Berlin, Germany after the war all the Allied forces confiscated areas of their own. There were American, Russian, French and English zones all carved out. On these sites D.P. camps were set up. These were fenced-off communities of barracks and abandoned buildings which offered shelter and food for victims of the war. My father and I moved into a D.P. camp run by the American Army. We took this opportunity to sort our lives out and put them in order to decide what we were going to do in the future. This set-up was not bad at all.

*July of 1948,*

I moved to another D.P. camp near Munich. This was in an area close to Vanzie where in 1942 the Nazis including Hitler and other high ranking officials planned and decided when to start the war and begin the killings. I only stayed there for a few weeks. Then I moved back to Berlin and rented an apartment with my father. We bought and sold and traded food and merchandise on the streets for a living.

I met up with a friend one day. He told me he would like to introduce me to a lady he was friends with who lived in Brooklyn. This woman and I ended up falling in love together. August 14, 1954 I married Rita in Lakewood, New Jersey. Rita moved in with me and together we had built and run over five chicken and cow farms. All of which have since been developed over.

My wife and I ran the farming business together. We were doing well and expanded our business by buying and running more chicken and cow farms around the area we lived.

We were eventually in a secure enough position to start a family. We decided to have children. We are the proud parents of four boys and one girl. Fred, 1955; Alan, 1956; Marc, 1962; Eileen (named after my little sister), 1966 and Jeff, 1970. We all lived together with my wife's mother and my father in that same house I had bought when I first arrived. This house was not big enough for such a large family. March 2, 1975 we moved to a house in Lakewood where we presently live.

## CHAPTER 2 PRESENT LIFE

Eventually we sold our farms and entered the real estate business. Before long I was buying and selling property. It always felt ironic to me or maybe even strangely natural that I was making a living dealing with something which I was never allowed to have during the war but was always one with.

The family's baby who I delivered in the woods in May of 1944 emigrated to Israel after the war. They moved on with their life. They had two more children. The baby who I delivered grew up to become an Israeli soldier who fought in 1973 Yom Kippur War in Sinai. Unfortunately he had to sacrifice his life fighting for the freedom of his people and country.

The farmer who kept this and other families was given an award.

My loving father who had been through every terrible experience with me and all the good times after the war died in 1979 at 81 years of age.